



NCTJ Diploma in Journalism

The NCTJ Diploma in Journalism is designed to equip trainee journalists with the essential skills required to develop their careers to become professional journalists. The qualification aims to meet the needs of employers and to provide trainees with the basic knowledge and skills for entry level journalism.

The fundamental skills of high quality journalism in converged newsrooms are the heart of the Diploma in Journalism. The programmes of study are designed to equip candidates with the skills they need for multi-platform journalism whether it be in newspapers, magazines, online, television or radio.

All the leading employers across all media sectors as well as education and training providers were consulted on the structure and content of the diploma. Each subject in the diploma has a high profile, experienced and respected chief examiner.

To gain the diploma, all candidates **MUST** complete the five mandatory subjects – the core skills for all journalists – plus at least two of the specialist options.

The mandatory subjects are: Reporting; Essential Public Affairs; Essential Media Law; Shorthand; and Portfolio. These are the skills that the journalists require and therefore keep doors open to developing a career in all media and any journalism jobs.

Specialist options are: Media Law: Court Reporting; Video Journalism for Online; Production Journalism; Sports Journalism; Business of Magazines; and Broadcast Journalism. Not all journalists require all these skills in-depth, and so the NCTJ has provided a flexible choice of options for centres and candidates.

This preliminary qualification can be gained by attending an NCTJ-accredited course, by training on-the-job and by distance learning. Some approved exam centres offer their students the opportunity to sit NCTJ exams, but this training is not accredited by the NCTJ. Anyone can sit the Diploma in Journalism exams on the national dates held twice a year in April and November.

Note that NCTJ-accredited courses must deliver the mandatory subjects and at least two options. Centres can choose which options they offer students and this will vary depending on the course and the type of centre. If a centre doesn't offer an option it can be studied by distance learning.

Reporting

Reporting is an essential skill for journalists and the NCTJ's syllabus covers multi-platform reporting for newspapers, magazines, online, television and radio journalism. This includes a practical understanding of news, news gathering, effective interviewing, creating different types of news stories, different ways of consuming news, using interactivity, basic sub-editing, and reporting safely. Students and trainees need to master the skill of being able to write 'clean' copy that is accurate and engaging.

The programme of study has eight units:

1. News gathering

2. Interviewing
3. Writing and creating news stories
4. Reporting scenarios and writing different types of story
5. How news is consumed
6. Using interactivity
7. Production journalism
8. Other essentials including health and safety and freelancing

Trainees need to be able to create news reports for more than one platform to an exacting standard. This includes high standards of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Candidates are required to sit a two and a half hour examination, taken on computer, which assesses their multimedia reporting skills. Creating accurate material for publication across different platforms within the required length and to deadline is an essential skill of journalism.

The aim of the news reporting assessment is to ensure trainee journalists:

- Can recognise, obtain and select important, relevant and newsworthy facts from written and verbal sources
- Can use techniques including social media, reader polls, message boards, forums, reader comments to develop stories and a dialogue with readers, viewers and listeners
- Can create accurate, clear, vigorous and balanced reports in a form that will attract and interest the reader, viewer or listener. The reports must be legally safe and adhere to industry codes of practice and/or guidelines
- Demonstrate a sufficient standard of skill to work in a converged newsroom
- Demonstrate an ability to write for a number of platforms
- Can follow up a story naming valid sources and question areas, and identify appropriate picture, online video opportunities and other digital publication ideas

The exam is a test of the candidate's news sense, ability to select and prioritise key facts and quotes, and writing skills for different platforms. Marks are awarded for content, accuracy, use of language, a good angle and introduction, story structure, and the choice and use of quotes. The ability to develop a story and to identify relevant sources and questions is also tested.

Portfolio

Journalists are increasingly expected to work across a range of platforms. Newsrooms, to a greater or lesser extent, exploit a wide range of techniques to publish news and information.

The portfolio is a candidate's opportunity to demonstrate a range of work and, preferably, work that has been published across different platforms.

The aim of this assessment is to ensure trainee journalists can demonstrate they have the skills required in the reporting programme of study (see above) and it complements the reporting examination.

When complete the portfolio should include:

- Ten pieces of journalism, presented on any platform
- One of those ten pieces of journalism must be a news feature relating to the public affairs syllabus.

The PA news feature sheet must also be completed. It provides a supporting statement of approximately 200 words. This is not marked, but provides information to assist markers and moderators.

- For those following a news reporting course, at least one of the other nine pieces of work must be a minimum 500-word feature that contains information gained from one or more interviews
- For those following a broadcast course, at least one piece of work must be an audio feature (90-120 seconds) and another piece must be a video feature (1-2½ minutes)
- For those following a magazine course, at least one piece of work must be a 650-word round-up suitable for publication in the opening pages of a magazine; one feature directed at a clearly identified B2B audience; one feature based on an interview; and one piece of analysis.

Stories and features are assessed on content, structure, accuracy, relevancy, and that they demonstrate a good understanding of the subject. They should be captivating and draw the reader, to the subject. There should be clear evidence of initiative in sourcing the story. They should be relevant to the chosen publishing platform. Public affairs news features are also assessed on background research and interviews including picture opportunities.

Shorthand

Shorthand is an extremely valuable skill for the competent journalist. The NCTJ's gold standard is to achieve at least 100 words per minute (wpm) and to be able to identify a newsworthy quote. The exam format has been developed to test listening skills as well as accuracy and speed.

The programme of study includes the following units:

1. Journalism terminology and English grammar and punctuation
2. Detailed use and knowledge of Teeline shorthand, an industry recognised system of note-taking by hand
3. Development of shorthand vocabulary, special outlines/short forms and word grouping/phrases
4. Listening and memorising techniques
5. Planning and organising work within deadlines
6. Identification of key quotes

The syllabus enables learners to acquire the skills required for reporting accurately using Teeline, an industry recognised system of shorthand. They can gain the ability to take down the spoken word verbatim at a range of speeds – 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110 and 120wpm – and to produce an accurate transcript within an error tolerance of three per cent. In addition, trainees must identify and accurately transcribe a key quote at speeds of 90 to 120wpm.

Essential Public Affairs

It is still widely accepted that professional journalists should have a broad understanding of how government works at a local and national level, how they link together, where news stories come from and how to develop such stories. Public affairs learning should be integrated with practical journalism and trainees must have an awareness of current news issues related to public affairs.

The syllabus does not require time to be spent on the rote learning of excessive and esoteric detail. It aims to be relevant to all sectors of the media based on what trainees need to know and the skills they need to acquire.

The programme of study has six units:

1. Controlling power: local government; the constitution, monarchy and devolution; the executive; the legislature; and Europe
2. Holding the government to account, controlling information, and the right to know including: elections; and access to information and freedom of information
3. Controlling money including: local government finance; the treasury and economics; and business and industry
4. Frontline services: education; social services; the National Health Service and social welfare
5. The environment including: planning, protection and conservation; environmental health and licensing; highways and transport
6. Protecting the citizen: emergency services; the home office and ministry of justice

There are three different programmes of study and examinations for: England and Wales; Scotland; and Northern Ireland. However, trainees should have a broad understanding across all the nations.

Candidates are required to sit a two and a half hour examination which assesses their knowledge of public affairs and its practical application to the job of a journalist. They must also submit a practical journalism assignment on a story related to public affairs. This is examined in the portfolio (see above).

Essential Media Law

It is vital that all journalists know the legal and regulatory boundaries of what they can and cannot report. This covers both the Press Complaints Commission and Ofcom codes of practice. The media law essentials in the programme of study cover the following:

1. Basic knowledge of the law including the courts
2. Contempt and related matters
3. Anonymity
4. Accuracy
5. Defamation and related matters
6. Copyright
7. Confidentiality
8. Disclosure of confidential sources
9. Privacy and misuse of private information
10. Other ethical (including regulatory) considerations

Assessment is by a two and a half hour examination which assesses candidates' knowledge of media law and its practical application.

There are three different programmes of study and examinations: England and Wales; Scotland;

and Northern Ireland. Trainees should have a general understanding of the main differences in the law across the nations.

Trainees must be able to apply the law to the job of a journalist. Media law knowledge should be good in theory but more importantly well grounded in the day-to-day practicalities of working in a multimedia newsroom and reporting across platforms.

Professional journalists should have a basic understanding of court reporting even if it is not part of their role. More in-depth and comprehensive court reporting skills are catered for in the specialist option (see below).

Media Law Court Reporting

This specialist court reporting option builds on the introduction to court reporting in the essential media law syllabus. It covers court reporting restrictions, regulatory and ethical considerations. Those who wish to focus on hard news for any platform are advised to choose this option. Courts remain an excellent source for stories and those with good court reporting skills will stand out in the newsroom even if there is little day-to-day coverage of the courts.

The programme of study includes: contempt and related matters; juveniles, children and young persons; sexual offences; open justice (and exceptions); challenging court orders to restrict reporting and exclude the press; coroners' courts; and defamation related to courts and inquests.

Assessment is by a one and a half hour examination which assesses knowledge and application of media law related to court reporting.

Videojournalism for Online

This option is designed to enable candidates to produce short, focused video reports for use online on news websites. Creativity is encouraged but work should be to industry standards.

There are four study units:

1. Equipment and techniques
2. Videojournalism and news gathering
3. Interviewing
4. Regulation and compliance

Candidates are required to sit a two hour video-editing examination which assesses their basic editing and reporting skills and produce one video news package created entirely on their own. The aims of the assessments are to ensure trainee journalists:

- Understand the basic techniques used in videojournalism, the equipment and software used, scripting and putting together a "package"
- Can create accurate, clear, vigorous and balanced reports that will attract and interest the viewer
- Understand basic practical elements of telling any story in audio-visual form
- Understand the relevant legal and regulatory matters
- Demonstrate a sufficient standard of skill to work in a newsroom

Production Journalism

This specialist sub-editing option builds on the introduction to editing in the reporting syllabus.

The programme of study has ten study units:

1. Roles of the sub-editor
2. Desktop publishing
3. Subbing news stories
4. Subbing different types of stories
5. Sub-editing proof-reading online material
6. Headline writing
7. Typography
8. Pictures and captions
9. Proof reading
10. Design

Candidates submit a piece of coursework and sit a two hour on-screen sub-editing exam. They can choose either the news or magazine assessments.

In the exam, candidates have to edit one page lead, three fillers and listings as well as writing an on-line headline and a proof reading exercise.

For the coursework, news candidates should submit a tabloid news page subbed and designed solely by themselves. Magazine candidates produce a double page spread using an appropriate mix of stories, features, reviews, listings, factfiles or info panels written by themselves or their colleagues.

Sports Journalism

The sports journalism option takes the principles of general news reporting covered in reporting and applies them to the full range of sports reporting skills.

The programme of study ensures candidates can produce different types of story for all platforms required at each point in the sports news cycle; from preview through live report to inquest.

It equips trainees with sufficient understanding of sports politics and sports public affairs to be able to report on a wide range of issues relating to sport - issues that often spill over into news reports.

It also covers the other main situations in which sports journalists operate, including attending press conferences and conducting interviews. Sports features are also covered.

Sports Journalism focuses on three main sports – football, cricket and rugby (both union and league) – but also introduces candidates to the coverage of a range of other sports. Knowledge of sports and sporting organisations is also tested.

This syllabus also covers editing in order to equip sports reporters to be able to publish material without reference to editors and to turn their hand to production at busy times.

The exam is divided into two parts: a live match report where candidates produce half-time and final whistle stories; and a one hour exam testing current sporting knowledge and sports public affairs issues.

Business of Magazines

This option is designed to give trainees a thorough understanding of the magazine industry and how magazines work. The programme of study covers the distinction between B2B and consumer magazines, and delves into key types of consumer magazines including general consumer and specialist consumer, as well as regional and local consumer magazines.

Trainees gain an understanding of magazines in terms of market sector and audience. Revenue models, budgets – including editorial budgets – methods of distribution, advertising, marketing, printing processes, circulation and distribution are all explored.

Assessment is by a two hour examination in which candidates answer questions covering the full syllabus.

The aim of the assessment is to ensure trainee magazine journalists:

1. Can demonstrate a thorough understanding of the structure of the magazine industry
2. Understand the different requirements of and audiences for business to business and a range of consumer magazines
3. Appreciate how magazines work as businesses, and are aware of their main sources of revenue
4. Have a full awareness of the place of editorial in the overall structure of a magazine
5. Understand the functions and importance of departments including marketing and advertising, and how editorial must work with them to the benefit of the magazine
6. Understand the magazine production process

Broadcast Journalism

This specialist option is in development and will be available from September 2012. The module will cover the additional skills required to operate effectively as a broadcast journalist in television and radio that are not covered in the core mandatory subjects.

Meanwhile, trainees who are interested in broadcast journalism can choose from any of the other specialist options.