

NATIONAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

REPORTERS

Examiners' Report

November 2011

**NATIONAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
FOR REPORTERS
November 2011**

In November, a total of 101 candidates sat the National Certificate Examination across seven centres. The National Certificate was awarded to 53 candidates – a pass rate of 52 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

**TED BOTTOMLEY AWARD (NEWSPAPER PRACTICE – £250)
Sponsored by Midland News Association**

Jasmin McDermott

Southend Evening Echo

This paper had an excellent all-round approach. The law answer showed knowledge and how to apply it. When it came to the part B answers these had been well thought out. Jasmin adopted a good strategy to both answers that would have produced sound coverage.

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

Benjamin Wilkinson

Oxford Mail

Benjamin's paper had a good selection of the key facts. The background he included provided good context which was enhanced by well-chosen, strong quotes and reported speech.

SOCIETY OF EDITORS' AWARD (NEWS INTERVIEW – £250)

Sam Smith

Brentwood Gazette

Sam presented a very comprehensive story. He did not go for the run-of-the-mill intro and focused on the anguish of the mother losing her son. The first three paragraphs captured the tragedy; how Adam sawed through the cable and his brother tried to stop him. There was the strong quote from the mother and he included the death of the boys' father. Sam was very ordered, polite and thorough in his questioning and asked questions of the interviewee that other candidates did not. The result was a well-structured story that flowed well and took the reader through from start to end.

NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)

Jennifer Stanton

Surrey Advertiser

Jennifer produced an impressive winning logbook among a host of very strong submissions. The logbook did all the basic things brilliantly, showed impeccable presentation and was both easy to mark and a joy to read. Jennifer demonstrated clear story-telling, a no-nonsense winner.

The following candidates, listed in alphabetical order by surname, have now gained the National Certificate Examination for Reporters.

<u>Name</u>		<u>Newspaper</u>
Beth	Allcock	<i>Northwich Guardian</i>
Christopher	Ballinger	<i>Courier Newspapers</i>
Daniel	Bean	<i>The Press, York</i>
John	Birch	<i>Newark Advertiser</i>
Catherine	Bolado	<i>Dorset Echo</i>
James Michael	Brindle	<i>Burton Daily Mail</i>
Laurey	Buckland	<i>Newark Advertiser</i>
Rachel	Butler	<i>Derby Evening Telegraph</i>
Jill	Castle	<i>Kirkintilloch Herald</i>
Paul	Clifford	<i>Shields Gazette</i>
Stephanie	Cureton	<i>Wirral Globe</i>
Simon	Farr	<i>Bucks Free Press</i>
David	Ford	<i>Halifax Evening Courier</i>
Tim	Fletcher	<i>Burton Daily Mail</i>
Sophie	Flowers	<i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>
John	Fuller	<i>West Cumberland Times & Star</i>
Hayley	Gallimore	<i>Worksop Guardian</i>
Andrew	Gray	<i>Kent Messenger</i>
Andrew	Groves	<i>Harrogate Advertiser</i>
Christopher	Hewett	<i>Watford Observer</i>
David Edward	Higgs	<i>Hereford Journal</i>
Alexander	Homer	<i>Express & Star</i>
Caroline	Iverson	<i>West Cumberland Times & Star</i>
Scott	Kirk	<i>Westmorland Gazette</i>
Laura	Linham	<i>Mid Somerset Newspapers</i>
Jasmin Claire	McDermott	<i>Southend Evening Echo</i>
Christopher	Melvin	<i>Wiltshire Times</i>
David	Mercer	<i>Press Association</i>
Will	Metcalfe	<i>North West Evening Mail</i>
Helen	Morton	<i>Basingstoke Gazette</i>
Simon Philip	Moss	<i>Basingstoke Gazette</i>
Omar	Oakes	<i>Wimbledon Guardian</i>
Sara	Odeen-Isbister	<i>Barking & Dagenham Post</i>
James	Palmer	<i>Courier Newspapers</i>
Kenny	Paterson	<i>Berwickshire News</i>
Helen Mary	Perkins	<i>Westmorland Gazette</i>
Suzanne	Pike	<i>Grantham Journal</i>
Paul	Rogers	<i>Hereford Times</i>
James	Scott	<i>Kentish Express</i>
Sophie Emily	Scott	<i>Luton on Sunday</i>
Sam	Smith	<i>Brentwood Gazette</i>
Jennifer	Stanton	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Colin	Strachan	<i>Wakefield Express</i>
Elizabeth	Sweetman	<i>Worcester News</i>
Jack William	Tappin	<i>Haverhill Echo</i>
Andrew	Turton	<i>Express & Star</i>
Nicholas	Wakefield	<i>Stroud News & Journal</i>
Lindsay	Watling	<i>Aberdeen Press & Journal</i>
Matthew	White	<i>Isle of Wight County Press</i>
Benjamin	Wilkinson	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Michael	Wilkinson	<i>Wiltshire Times</i>
Richard	Wood	<i>Lowestoft Journal</i>
Matthew	Young	<i>Courier Newspapers</i>

CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

Just over half of the 101 candidates who sat the National Certificate Examination in November were successful - a slight increase on the pass rate for the July exam.

The pass rate of 52 per cent (53 passes) included a 56 per cent (35 passes) success rate among first-time entries and 47 per cent (18 passes) for re-sit candidates.

There were highs and lows among the reports of the examiners responsible for the four parts of the exam - News Interview, Newspaper Practice, News Report and Logbook.

It was in the News Report and News Interview sections where the pass rate was lowest, and this was largely through factual errors.

There was an improved pass rate in Newspaper Practice, while the Logbook section produced an excellent selection of entries.

It should be noted that the entry figure was the highest since July 2010, pointing to a trend among employers to recruit trainee journalists after the difficulties posed by the credit crunch.

Congratulations go to the four award winners - Jasmin McDermott, *Southend Evening Echo* (Newspaper Practice), Benjamin Wilkinson, *Oxford Mail* (News Report), Sam Smith, *Brentwood Gazette* (Interview) and Jennifer Stanton, *Surrey Advertiser* (Logbook). They each receive a cheque for £250.

NEWSPAPER PRACTICE – 86 candidates; 60 passed – 70 per cent

Part A tests knowledge of law and ethics and how it works in a practical way. The questions try to reflect the problems reporters face on a daily basis. To be able to pass, reporters need to know the basics and how to apply them. They are allowed to take in Essential Law for Journalists but there is evidence that some candidates either did not use it to check what they already knew or they did not understand what they read. This indicates the difficulty some reporters have in coping with practical and theoretical elements of this exam.

One marker referred to some answers being “flighty or ambiguous without quoting the law or applying it correctly”. To have passed this section, candidates needed to have mastered defamation and the defence offered by qualified privilege; what constitutes contempt under the Contempt of Court Act 1981 and if there are any defences; reporting restrictions under the Magistrates Court Act 1980; and the PCC Editors’ Code of Conduct as it applies to children and sex cases.

Part B asks candidates to put into words what they should be doing intuitively during their working lives. How should I pursue a story? Who will I talk to? Why? What will I ask them? What scope is there for still or moving images? Once again there was evidence that some candidates did not leave themselves enough time to complete both questions adequately and as a result both sets of answers were woolly and repetitious.

One of the scenarios was about a couple who met through a suicide website and had decided to get married. Markers were looking for candidates to show sensitivity but also to be challenging when dealing with the website. A number of candidates did not even suggest going to the website.

Another question referred to a small number of people involved in a new cancer treatment. Candidates were expected to have challenged whether such a small number of people could produce results that could be trusted. Some candidates said they wanted to interview some of the people taking part but did not explain how they would do this as they were anonymous. However, there were some good answers and the markers congratulate those candidates who passed and hope that those resitting the exam next March will pick up some tips from this report.

We suggest that not only do candidates look at the PCC website for its latest adjudications but also download Reporting Restrictions in the Criminal Courts, a joint publication by the Judicial Studies Board, Newspaper Society, the Society of Editors and The Times newspaper.

NEWS REPORT – 94 candidates; 58 passed – 62 per cent

A straight-forward hard news story about an earthquake in the early hours of the morning proved surprisingly difficult for candidates.

The 4.1 magnitude earthquake, deep under the sea 30 miles west of Meston, was the largest recorded in the area and could be felt 50 miles inland. Police received 149 calls while the fire and rescue service received 33 and sent officers out to inspect 12 buildings which owners feared might collapse.

No one was injured and the only damage was the loosening of some roof tiles on terraced cottages in Western Avenue, Borton.

Information about the earthquake, the frequency of earthquakes around the British Isles and the likelihood of aftershocks came from Dr Phyllis (Philip if a man) Moreten, chairman of the National Geographical Survey which is based in Borton.

Stories needed to include: the time, magnitude and effects of the earthquake; information from the emergency services; the damage, the possibility of aftershocks and the assurance from Dr Moreten that people should not be afraid; reference to the email from Shona Worster; the appeal to the public to report information to the National Geographical Survey and some historical detail of British and local earthquakes, particularly the number which had occurred in the Borton area since 1380.

The best stories contained three strong accurate quotes, two from Dr Moreten's speech and one from Shona Worster's email.

The markers were disappointed at the number of factual errors which appeared in reports, particularly when the information/spelling had been in the brief. Accuracy is the hallmark of a good journalist and candidates in the November NCE produced work of a lower standard than markers could remember seeing before. This is borne out by the highest mark achieved being 63, whereas normally there are a good percentage gaining upper 60s and several in the lower 70s.

The overall pass mark for News Report this time was well below the average.

While it is apparent that candidates are having difficulty taking an accurate note in shorthand, there can be no excuse for not listening to what is said. Quotes were littered with errors and omissions. In some cases it did not change the meaning of the speaker's information, but it is bad journalistic practice to make assumptions with wording because the shorthand is not good enough to take a full accurate note or it cannot be read back correctly.

The factual errors included the location of the earthquake which varied from 30 metres offshore to 13 miles and 60 miles. The correct figure was 30 miles. The statistics on the frequency of British earthquakes were often muddled and incorrect. The tiles loosened on the roofs of

cottages in Western Avenue were, in a number of cases, reported as having been lost, or fallen to the ground. The candidate who reported the terraced cottages as “Cost Cutters” needs to pay serious attention to his/her shorthand.

Errors from the brief, which were inexcusable and rightly cost valuable marks, were the name of the survey, variously called the National Geographic Survey or the National Geographical Society, and the name of the speaker.

It was also clear that despite a description in the brief of how earthquakes are caused, several candidates did not understand the principles and talked of “eruptions”.

A surprising number of candidates referred to the 2.30am earthquake as “last night” instead of “this morning” and too many stories gave the impression that the reporter had interviewed Shona Worster personally, instead of saying that she had emailed the newspaper.

The markers were left disheartened at the standard presented this time. The 62 per cent of candidates who passed the News Report section produced reasonable stories but even some of these would have needed a bit of work from sub-editors to polish them.

Lessons need to be learnt from this exam. Candidates must pay attention to detail, get their facts down correctly and improve their shorthand to enable them to select the best available quotes without errors and omissions.

Overall, a very disappointing section this time.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 88 candidates; 53 passed – 60 per cent

This was the story of unemployed 16-year-old Adam Mason, setting off late at night to go and steal cabling from a railway line with tragic consequences.

His older brother Greg went after him and as Adam hacksawed through a live 750 volt cable, he was flung five feet by the impact and suffered horrific burns. His brother was electrocuted. A barely conscious Greg, who is found three hours later, tells his rescuers how he tried to stop his young brother.

There are several good lines to this story: the death of Adam; Greg's attempt to stop his brother; the death 12 months earlier of their father also electrocuted while trying to steal copper from a power station; and the mum's harrowing quote about losing her "baby".

Candidates who got and used all the information, realised that Adam was a young man who had no job and no money, and saw his pals going out enjoying themselves.

However, many candidates did not pick up on Greg's attempt to stop his brother and many implicated the 19-year-old in the plot to steal cabling.

This could have led to legal action from the family.

Most candidates went for the electrocution line with Greg's attempt to stop him in the intro or second par, quickly followed by the father angle then the mother's quote.

Candidates earned marks by including the train disruption and the description of the boys.

Others lost marks, or failed because of the implication of Greg in the theft.

Many candidates do not know the difference between electrocution - you are dead - and electric shock - you are alive.

Other mistakes included vaults for volts. Many assumed it was the police force and not the British Transport Police - a totally different force.

Candidates did not check names - i.e. Halt instead of Holt. And one had the mother's name completely wrong despite it being spelt out by the interviewee.

There were mistakes when candidates did not check their copy and sloppy, silly literals and errors cost marks.

LOGBOOK – 63 candidates; 62 passed – 98 per cent

The November period of submission has seen an excellent selection of logbooks, as evidenced both by the low failure rate but also by the difficulty in selecting an overall logbook award winner.

Key tasks which have seen failures in the past such as inquests, councils and courts have been skillfully negotiated. Presentation has been of a high standard and candidates have clearly taken the time and effort over their logbooks to get the necessary pass.

However, the major incidents key task has now caused failures at the last three NCEs. Candidates must make sure that the incident that they are reporting on is an incident or event which has taken place in their own area. Previews or pieces reflecting on a major issue are not acceptable.

As always one would recommend that candidates should thoroughly check the criteria of each key task and always speak to an editor or trainer in the first instance if they are unsure.

National Certificate Examination for Reporters

Comparative figures

	NOV 2009	MAR 2010	JUL 2010	NOV 2010	MAR 2011	JUL 2011	NOV 2011
TOTAL ENTRY							
No of candidates	209	186	117	86	79	80	101
No of passes	106	98	74	53	49	37	53
No of failures	103	88	43	33	30	43	48
% passed	51	53	63	62	62	46	52

	NOV 2009	MAR 2010	JUL 2010	NOV 2010	MAR 2011	JUL 2011	NOV 2011
FIRST-TIMERS							
No of candidates	110	88	37	43	51	53	63
No of passes	52	39	17	25	32	27	35
No of failures	58	49	20	18	19	26	28
% passed	47	44	45	58	63	51	56

	NOV 2009	MAR 2010	JUL 2010	NOV 2010	MAR 2011	JUL 2011	NOV 2011
RE-SITS							
No of candidates	99	98	80	43	28	27	38
No of passes	54	59	57	28	17	10	18
No of failures	45	39	23	15	11	17	20
% passed	55	60	71	65	61	37	47

National Certificate Examination

Analysis of figures for each exam section (first-timers and re-sits)

	NOV 2009	MAR 2010	JUL 2010	NOV 2010	MAR 2011	JUL 2011	NOV 2011
NEWS INTERVIEW							
No of candidates	166	144	85	66	64	67	88
No of passes	105	94	60	49	51	36	53
No of failures	63	50	25	17	13	31	35
% passed	63	65	70	74	80	54	60
NEWS REPORT							
No of candidates	194	166	93	75	74	77	94
No of passes	110	100	62	50	48	41	58
No of failures	84	66	31	25	26	36	36
% passed	57	60	66	67	65	53	62

	NOV 2009	MAR 2010	JUL 2010	NOV 2010	MAR 2011	JUL 2011	NOV 2011
NEWSPAPER PRACTICE							
No of candidates	160	142	82	64	65	63	86
No of passes	107	89	62	51	52	37	60
No of failures	53	53	20	13	13	26	26
% passed	67	63	75	80	80	59	70

	NOV 2009	MAR 2010	JUL 2010	NOV 2010	MAR 2011	JUL 2011	NOV 2011
LOGBOOK							
No of candidates	115	96	41	43	53	55	63
No of passes	108	92	41	40	51	50	62
No of failures	7	4	0	3	2	5	1
% passed	94	96	100	93	96	91	98