

NATIONAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

SPORTS REPORTERS

Examiners' Report

November 2011

**NATIONAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
FOR SPORTS REPORTERS
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In November, one candidate sat the NCE for Sports Reporters; the National Certificate was awarded to:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Newspaper</u>
Stephen Tervet	<i>Kent on Sunday</i>

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

The NCE for Sports Reporters was staged in Portsmouth, attracting one candidate who achieved the NCE.

SPORTS INTERVIEW

The Sports Interview dealt with a straightforward topic of a non-league football club being taken over by an ambitious, millionaire businessman. The story had a number of angles to it, including the fact that the new owner had cleared the club's £1 million debt, the emergence of a group of mystery investors from the Far East, the appointment of his son as the club chairman and quotes from the owner about how much time he would be giving his under-pressure manager to turn fortunes around by securing league football.

It made for a carefully constructed interview requiring full use of the 20 minutes to explore the various angles. Even then, trying to squeeze the key facts into a 400-word story provided a secondary challenge.

In this instance, although the candidate didn't make the most of his 20 minutes and so missed out on a couple of angles, he nonetheless provided a neat piece of copy which earned a pass. However, it would have been interesting for the reporter to have pitted his story against a rival who may have picked up on the other angles to the story.

SPORTS REPORT

The theme for the sports report was golf, and a press conference staged by the Royal & Ancient Club to announce the venues of the Open golf championship for the next five years.

The speech was relatively straightforward, with a lot of detail thrown in, particularly historical detail. However the obvious angle was the (fictitious) announcement that the Open would be staged in Northern Ireland in 2016, for the first time since 1951. This would capitalise on the emergence of golf in the province through Rory McIlroy and Graeme McDowell winning major titles over the past 12 months.

The candidate produced a solid piece of copy, picking up on most of the key quotes. He missed out on details about the economic boost the Open would bring to Northern Ireland or what the championship would do for golf in the country. However, that should not dilute a pretty good piece of copy.

NEWSPAPER PRACTICE

The importance for sports journalists having a strong understanding of law and its application was demonstrated by this paper with questions which, though fictitious in their settings, relate to sports stories which frequently crop up and require careful handling by journalists.

For the first of the law questions, the sport was cycling and an initial press conference held by the British Cycling Federation to announce a positive drugs test of one of its cyclists, who had been suspended. The five-part question tested the candidate's understanding of defamation and contempt, and their application of those laws.

The questions focused on what could and could not be reported before and after a press conference, examining the legal issues, the reporting of police statements and arrests, and how a reporter would write a feature on drugs in sport the day after the cyclist's father had been charged with possession of illegal drugs with intent to supply.

The second part A question was written before England's rugby players' high jinks during the recent World Cup in New Zealand, but which rang true. The question centred on a Twitter feed from a well-known rugby player at a professional rugby club concerning the club captain, who was married a year ago and who had recently become a father. The Tweet divulged how the captain had become involved with a nightclub waitress on a stag night. The candidate was asked how much of the information could be published from the Twitter feed and what use could be made of Facebook photographs of the club captain in the newspaper. The question also looked at reporting claims by the woman that she was indecently assaulted, the reporting of a press conference organised by the rugby club, and reacting to defamatory comments posted on the newspaper's website by readers.

With the three-part B questions, the topics included gambling in sport following remarks made at a dinner by a professional footballer who had lost £1 million through betting. Another question dealt with the closure of three leisure centres in the town as part of cost-cutting measures and the impact on local sports clubs. A third option looked at the issue of head injuries in sport following a report from scientists warning that a single head injury may be enough to trigger dementia.

All three of the part B questions offered a rich source of material and which the candidate, in this case, handled extremely well. His law answers were very good, adopting a useful technique of identifying the laws involved with each question, defining them and then applying them to each part.

LOGBOOK

The sports logbook is based on very similar lines to the news logbook, testing the various facets of a sports reporter's training. This was one of the key reasons for the creation of the sports NCE since, previously, sports reporters taking the news NCE would have needed to find material for inquests, court stories, council meetings etc. The sports logbook tests the different disciplines and types of story which should be covered during a journalist's 18-month period of training. The one logbook submitted for this exam was of a very good standard, noticeable for the wealth of different sports covered, which was encouraging.

Comparative Figures:

Sports reporters	March 2010	July 2010	November 2010	July 2011	November 2011
No of candidates	3	3	2	1	1
No of passes	2	2	2	1	1
No of failures	1	1	0	0	0
% passed	66%	66%	100%	100%	100%

The National Certificate Examination for Sports Reporters consists of four sections:

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 are 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

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 are 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 that 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 are asked to answer one media law question and two follow-up questions.

Sports Logbook

This record of work and portfolio of cuttings requires candidates to demonstrate that 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 should 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.