

SO YOU WANT TO BE A JOURNALIST?

This information pack has been compiled by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) for those considering a career in journalism. It will help you to make the right choices regarding further and higher education courses, advise you of the exams you must pass in order to work as a journalist within certain fields, and help you choose the right study method for you.

So why listen to us? The National Council for the Training of Journalists is the industry's charity that delivers the premier training scheme for journalists in the UK. We provide a world-class education and training system that develops current and future journalists for the demands of a fast-changing multimedia industry.

Our range of journalism training products and services includes: accredited courses; qualifications and exams; awards; careers information; distance learning; short courses and continuing professional development; information and research; publications and events. We play an influential role in all areas of journalism education and training.

In the 21st century journalism has converged. In the past the different branches of journalism were clear, but today all media are publishing on the web and the skills required to work across all platforms are integrated. Traditional broadcast skills and web skills are needed by print journalists.

You can start a career in any platform, and it's not a necessity to start on a small newspaper, niche magazine or tiny cable channel. You could quite easily begin on a large regional daily, top consumer title or at a major broadcasting corporation.

Some of the journalists have learned their trade on the job, but many will have undergone some kind of formal training.

Not everyone who has undergone formal training is brilliant at their job, and it is by no means the case that everyone who learnt on the job is a bad journalist.

But what training does is give able people a short cut. It saves them time by teaching them the basics of journalism accurately and effectively. It means they don't need to learn by trial and error. They can get it right first time.

And the NCTJ is second-to-none in setting the standards for journalism training. Through its examinations and the courses which carry its accreditation, it equips would-be journalists to find their first job in the profession, and helps working journalists to progress to the next rung up the ladder.

An NCTJ qualification equips you with the skills you need to be an effective reporter. It gives you a solid grounding in shorthand, law and how government works. With an NCTJ certificate on your CV, a prospective employer knows you have grasped the basics.

If, even after reading this leaflet, you're still not sure, we'll be more than happy to answer any questions you have about the NCTJ and the courses we accredit. You can call us on 01799 544014, email us at info@nctj.com or visit us at www.nctj.com.

TRAIN AS A JOURNALIST – CAREERS ADVICE

Journalism is often seen as glamorous and exciting but, as with any occupation, success comes only after much hard work and routine activity. However, each day in journalism is different and the training you receive will give you the flexibility to cover a wide range of news stories and features across a range of platforms.

Multimedia journalism draws on all the knowledge and skills you have acquired and can give you a tremendous sense of achievement. If you've got what it takes, journalism could be the career for you!

WHAT QUALITIES DO EDITORS LOOK FOR?

To convince an editor you're worth appointing you will need to be able to demonstrate the following:

- an interest in current affairs at all levels
- a lively interest in people, places and events
- an ability to write in a style which is easy to understand
- good spelling, grammar and punctuation
- an appreciation of the role a local newspaper plays in the community
- a willingness to accept irregular working hours
- an ability to work under pressure to meet deadlines
- determination and persistence.

HOW DO I GET INTO JOURNALISM?

Route 1 – pre-entry (after completion of a further or higher education course)

The majority of trainees are recruited into the industry after attending full-time vocational training courses for both post A-level students and graduates. Courses accredited by the NCTJ are held at colleges, universities and commercial centres across the UK. All cover the essential skills of news writing (print and online), media law, ethics, government, and shorthand to 100 wpm. Some courses also offer additional elements in sub-editing and/or sports journalism. Some of these courses are for graduates only while others require five GCSEs including English and two A-levels. This route is known as pre-entry.

Courses accredited by the NCTJ should display this logo, so look out for it when researching which course to study:



To apply for a course at further education or commercial centres, you need to download an application form from the NCTJ website - www.nctj.com. You can apply for higher education/university courses through UCAS. Application forms must be returned to the NCTJ as soon as possible or at least six weeks before the start of the course.

If invited for an interview at the centre of your choice, you may be required to take a written test, based on current affairs knowledge, to test your English skills and writing ability.

Most colleges will only grant places if the applicants have already been on a brief work experience placement at a news organisation. You should write to a number of local print, broadcast or online editors, explain why you think you would make a good reporter and ask if they will allow you to join their team for a few days. Try to pick a time other than June or July, when pressure on work experience places is at its greatest.

Route 2 – direct entry

Trainee reporters and photographers are occasionally recruited directly by regional or local news organisations and carry out their basic training under the terms of a training contract. There are also those who may have secured employment with a newspaper group of companies who run their own training scheme. Positions like these are, however, becoming increasingly rare.

Apply directly to the editor of a regional or local news organisation for employment as a trainee. Their names and addresses can be obtained from current editions of *Benn's UK Media Directory* and *Willings Press Guide*. Copies are available at your local library in the reference section or via the websites www.mediauk.com and www.willingspress.com

Training: If you have been recruited into the industry from school or university, you will be regarded as a **direct entrant**. Most companies will expect you to enter into a two-year training contract during which time you will receive basic training. The first six months of employment is likely to be a probationary period during which you will be able to decide whether you have got what it takes to become a successful journalist. Most companies will register you with the NCTJ and provide you with distance learning materials to study.

You may also attend a block release or day release course at college, during which time you will sit the NCTJ's preliminary Certificate in Journalism exams. Again, this is extremely rare. Following a further period of employment, you will have the opportunity to prove you are competent as a senior reporter by achieving the NCTJ's National Certificate Exam.

HOW DO I GET INTO PHOTOJOURNALISM OR PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY?

Photojournalism, as the term implies, is a journalism-based course with photography as its foundation. Tutors will help you develop natural news sense in tune with an ability to use a camera and ancillary equipment to the best advantage; there is also a comprehensive reporter module.

The press photography course contains all the above elements without the reporter's module.

The qualities you need to be accepted on an NCTJ course and to be a photo-journalist/press photographer are energy; drive; commitment; single-mindedness; personality and an enquiring mind which can look at the obvious and see something different - or better - by way of a 'news line' and picture.

If you are successful in obtaining a place at Sheffield College, the only centre to offer an NCTJ-accredited photography course, you will undergo intensive practical and theoretical training to prepare you for your career.

Download an application form from the NCTJ website at www.nctj.com. Suitable applicants are required to take a written test and, if successful, will be invited to attend a selection interview.

HOW DO I GET INTO MAGAZINE JOURNALISM?

Courses are run at various colleges - see the NCTJ website for more information. The courses cover media law, ethics, government, shorthand to 80 wpm, news & feature writing, production and design (print and online), subbing and background to the magazine industry.

There is also a mandatory period of work experience on a magazine. NCTJ preliminary examinations will be undertaken, together with the assessment of a portfolio of work produced on course.

To apply for a course at further education or commercial centres, download an application form from the NCTJ website, www.nctj.com Complete and return it to the NCTJ as soon as possible or at least six weeks before the start of the course.

For higher education/university courses, apply through UCAS.

WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO I NEED?

The entry requirement for reporters is a minimum of five GCSE passes (grades A-C) or equivalent - one of these must be in English. However, in recent years it has become rare for a trainee to come into the industry at this level. Currently, most recruits are university graduates and the others have achieved at least two A-levels or equivalent.

NCTJ training courses lead to a variety of qualifications including BA degrees, postgraduate diplomas and master's degrees. All NCTJ courses cover the aspects of media law, public affairs and journalism necessary to enable a journalist to perform competently by the end of the training period. As well as demonstrating competence in these and other practical areas, trainees are expected to achieve 100 wpm shorthand.

If you have attended a full-time journalism course before obtaining employment, you will probably enter into an 18-month training contract - the first three months is likely to be a probationary period. As with direct entrants, you will still be expected to prove your competence as a senior reporter after a period of employment, and obtain the NCTJ's National Certificate.

Exemptions

There have been occasions when individuals who have shown exceptional talent but have not achieved the minimum academic qualifications have been granted a waiver. However, this is unusual. The majority of new entrants to journalism are now graduates.

Mature entrants

Each year the industry receives many career enquiries from mature people. Some editors like to employ these people because of their considerable local knowledge and more settled lifestyle. Over the age of 30, training is a matter for arrangement by the editor.

IS THERE FINANCIAL HELP AVAILABLE TO HELP ME STUDY?

A few local educational authorities may award grants to meet part of the cost. Early enquiries should be made as grants are extremely limited.

Before applying for a full-time course, it is essential candidates establish their financial situation and determine how to cover the costs involved. Contact the centre you're considering studying at for details of course fees, which can range from £1,000 to £7,000 depending on the course chosen.

In addition to these, there are subsistence costs, travel, exam fees and textbooks to be considered.

Career Development Loans may also be available. Contact your local careers office or job centre. For postgraduate courses at universities apply directly to the university. For degree courses, apply through UCAS.



Bursary schemes

A Journalism Diversity Fund has been set up by those in the industry who want to support the training of journalists from socially and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

This industry fund was set up with the help of the Newspaper Licensing Agency (NLA) in association with leading publishing companies including Associated Newspapers, the Guardian Media Group, News International and Pearson.

It is aimed at people without the financial means to attend NCTJ training courses. Applicants will need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to journalism and the potential to succeed.

The fund can help financially by paying course fees and living expenses, as well as providing a mentor, and helping to find work experience.

Individuals who make an application to the fund should meet the following criteria. They must:

- be able to provide proof they have submitted an application to an NCTJ-accredited course, or have secured a place, for the relevant academic year;
- not have the financial means to support themselves on an NCTJ-accredited course;
- be a British citizen residing in the UK;
- be able to demonstrate genuine commitment and potential to be a successful journalist, through application and interview;
- not be in receipt of any other bursary award.

Check out the website www.journalismdiversityfund.co.uk to find out more about the fund and to download an application form.

CERTIFICATE IN JOURNALISM FOR NEWS REPORTERS

Seven preliminary assessments for reporters are compulsory for those going on to take the NCTJ's professional qualification, the National Certificate Exam.

In most cases, the six exams will be sat while on an NCTJ-accredited course or during an in-company training course. A portfolio is also to be submitted for assessment. Exams are also available on national exam dates held twice a year, in April and November. Application forms are available from the NCTJ.

The following titles are recommended to cover the NCTJ's syllabus:

- *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists* (20th edition)
- *Public Affairs for Journalists*
- *Essential Reporting: The NCTJ Guide for Trainee Journalists*
- *Teeline Gold Standard for Journalists*

All titles are available from the NCTJ's online shop at www.nctj.com

EXAMS AND ASSESSMENTS

- **News writing:** a test of candidates' ability to understand information provided in a variety of written forms, recognise what is newsworthy, and write news stories in acceptable English to a given length, in a given time. Candidates write a news story of about 300 words, rewrite two shorter stories and suggest three follow-up ideas and ways to develop a story using various multi-media platforms (ie video, online etc).
- **Media law: court reporting** and **media law: general reporting:** test candidates' knowledge and understanding of media law and codes of professional conduct, and their ability to put this into practice.
- **Public affairs: local government** and **public affairs: central government:** test candidates' knowledge and understanding of local and central government structures, and their ability to put this into practice.
- **Shorthand (Teeline):** tests candidates' ability to record and transcribe speech accurately at 100 wpm. Exams are available at a range of speeds.
- **Portfolio:** demonstrates a variety of reporting styles and is also a record of training. Students can include ten stories and a feature, or eight stories, one feature and one video report.

Optional subjects: students at some centres will also have the opportunity to take exams in:

- **Sub-editing:** candidates create a completed news page and sit an exam involving subbing, proofing and headline writing.
- **Sports journalism:** candidates write a 'live' match report and a round-up story from several reports. They also answer a question about sport, sport politics or public affairs, and draft questions to ask a named major sporting figure.

CERTIFICATE IN JOURNALISM FOR MAGAZINE JOURNALISTS

Trainees on NCTJ-accredited magazine courses will sit the following exams and submit a portfolio for assessment.

EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENTS

- **News writing:** a test of candidates' ability to understand information provided in a variety of written forms, recognise what is newsworthy, and write news stories in acceptable English to a given length, in a given time. Candidates write a news story of about 300 words, rewrite two shorter stories and suggest three follow-up ideas and ways to develop a story using various multi-media platforms (ie video, online etc).
- **Public affairs: central government:** tests candidates' knowledge of central Government structure and their ability to put this into practice.
- **Media law: general reporting:** tests candidates' knowledge and understanding of defamation and contempt and codes of professional conduct, and their ability to put this into practice.
- **Sub-editing** - a two-hour exercise in subbing hard copy; subbing on screen; copy correction using proof correction marks; cutting copy, writing headlines, captions and pull quotes; dealing with pictures/images; laying out and designing a two-page spread.
- **Shorthand (Teeline):** tests candidates' ability to record and transcribe speech accurately to 80wpm.
- **Portfolio:** this demonstrates a range of magazine reporting and feature writing, and also serves as a record of training. Candidates can submit either six written features to complete the portfolio, or five written features and one video report.

CERTIFICATE IN JOURNALISM FOR PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS & PHOTOJOURNALISTS

The preliminary Certificates in Journalism for photographers and photojournalists are compulsory exams for those going on to take the NCTJ's professional qualification, the National Certificate Exam.

In most cases the exams will be sat while on an NCTJ-accredited course.

EXAMS FOR PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS:

- **General photographic knowledge:** examines light; cameras; lenses and accessories – still and moving images; exposure and processing; colour – image production and output; current and new technology; health and safety.
- **Photographic practice:** examines PCC code of conduct; history and traditions of the press; moral and ethical issues involved in digital imagery; professional working practices.
- **Media law for photographers:** examines general reporting relevant to photographers. Takes in contempt; copyright; confidentiality; reporting restrictions; courts and the law.
- **Caption writing:** candidates select the relevant and newsworthy facts and write clear, accurate and balanced news captions to accompany two given photographs.
- **Portfolio:** a record of training and work experience, this also provides evidence of skills for prospective employers. It includes ten photographs, covering a range of techniques and categories, plus a video report.

EXAMS FOR PHOTOJOURNALISTS:

Photo-journalists sit exams in general photographic knowledge, photographic practice and law, and complete the portfolio, as above, and must also sit:

- **News writing for photojournalists:** candidates write two 50-word captions to accompany two photographs. A self-contained caption story of 150 to 170 words to accompany three linked photographs is also completed, plus a one-line caption for each picture.

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