

**National Council for the  
Training of Journalists**

**NCTJ Level 5  
National Qualification in Journalism  
Qualification Specification**

QAN No: 601/5023/3  
National Qualifications Framework

NCTJ Training Ltd  
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## **1. Rationale**

The National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) is designed to examine all-round competence in a range of fundamental skills at a level appropriate to a newspaper journalist who has completed the basic training programme, including a properly supervised period of practical training. The development of this qualification included consultation with industry representatives and the award is recognised by employers as an industry standard for a senior journalist.

## **2. Aims and objectives**

The qualification aims to meet the needs of employers and to provide trainee journalists with the knowledge and skills required for a senior journalist. The fundamental skills of high quality journalism in converged newsrooms are the heart of the National Qualification in Journalism. The programmes of study are designed to equip trainee journalists with the skills they need for multi-platform journalism. Leading newspaper employers were consulted on the structure and content of the qualification.

## **3. Progression**

The NCTJ National Qualification in Journalism is an industry recognised qualification. To gain the NQJ learners must complete four mandatory units. The four mandatory units are: e-logbook for journalists; media law and practice; news report; and news interview. Gaining the qualification leads to senior journalist status.

## **4. Target groups and entry details**

This syllabus provides opportunities for continuing professional development for trainee journalists who are already engaged in careers as professional journalists.

To be eligible to sit the NQJ, candidates must have completed the NCTJ Level 3 Diploma in Journalism gaining grades A-C in all units including 100 words per minute shorthand (candidates must also have gained grade A-C in media law; court reporting, a specialist option in the Diploma). The NQJ can be entered for after at least eighteen months employment within the industry.

NCTJ entry requirements are intended to ensure that there are no barriers to restrict access and progression and equal opportunities exist for all learners. Learners with Particular Educational Needs are not targeted separately although special provision may be made for them.

## **5. Total Qualification Time**

Total qualification time (TQT) aims to provide learners with an indication of the minimum length of time it would take an average learner to complete this qualification.

TQT is made up of two components:

- 1) Guided learning: activities completed by the learner under the direct instruction or supervision of a tutor, trainer or other appropriate provider of education or training.
- 2) All other hours spent in preparation, study or training, including assessment time, but not under the direct supervision of a tutor, trainer or other appropriate training provider.

This syllabus incorporates a programme of study that includes an estimated 30 hours *guided learning (the estimated minimum time an average learner may expect to spend under direct instruction or supervision of a tutor or trainer)*.

An average learner can also reasonably expect to spend an estimated 170 hours in preparation, study or any other form of participation in education or training, including assessment, which takes place as directed by a tutor, trainer or other appropriate training provider.

### **TQT**

The total qualification time an average learner can expect to take to complete the qualification is 200 hours.

Learning will be mostly on-the-job, but three days off-the-job learning is required immediately prior to the examinations. Much of the on-the-job guided learning will be based upon the day-to-day work of candidates and evidenced by the submissions made for their e-logbook assessment.

Candidates will carry out off-the-job learning on a three-day refresher training programme which covers all aspects of the qualification including the assessments. In addition they will complete supported self-study of media law and ethics for the media law and practice unit.

### **6. Assessment**

Each unit is assessed by examination apart from the e-logbook for journalists which is a continuous assessment. The e-logbook is completed over a minimum eighteen month on-the-job training period. Details on each assessment are available on the NCTJ's website at [www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com). Each unit has a programme of study which include the aims, learning objectives and outcomes, how marks are awarded and grade descriptors on which learners' levels of attainment will be differentiated.

The criterion against which individual performance within the qualification and units is differentiated is specified in each of the units' programme of study in the grade descriptors. The grading scale used to signify performance differentiation within the qualification and units is Pass, Merit and Distinction.

### **7. Availability of examinations and assessments**

Candidates must have gained the NCTJ Level 3 Diploma in Journalism, meeting the industry standard of A-C grades in each unit, 100 wpm shorthand, and completion of the specialist option, media law: court reporting. Examinations are available three times per year on set dates at allocated centres. Further details are available on the NCTJ website.

### **8. Duration of examinations**

All examinations are structured so that the duration of each examination provides opportunities for all candidates to demonstrate achievement within a set time-frame. Time allowed for Media Law and Practice is: one hour 20 minutes; News Report is: one hour 30 minutes; and News Interview is: one hour 40 minutes.

### **9. Fair access to assessment**

Information on assessment and examination and entry requirements for candidates with particular needs is published in the 'Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy'. A copy of this policy is available from NCTJ Training Ltd, The New Granary, Station Road, Newport, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 3PL and is published on the NCTJ website: [www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com)

### **10. Validity of syllabus**

This qualification specification and syllabus is for the NCTJ level 5 National Qualification in Journalism and is valid until September 2018.

### **11. Repeats of examinations**

Where a candidate is not able to reach the minimum standard in an examination, application for re-examination at that level is permitted.

### **12. Issue of results**

Results and certificates will normally be issued within six weeks of the date of the examination. This time is necessary to ensure that all results are properly standardised and checked by the NCTJ.

### **13. Language and bias**

Every effort has been made to ensure that this syllabus and associated mark schemes, procedures and materials are free from any form of bias, refer to explicit content and have no hidden requirements for entry or assessment.

Care has been taken to ensure that the syllabus, grade descriptors and examination components make appropriate demands on learners both in terms of their physical safety and well being and expectations of physical and cognitive performance in relation to their age and level of ability.

### **14. Confidentiality**

In order to ensure that the NQJ qualification reflects an accurate measure of attainment, the NCTJ will take all reasonable steps to ensure that such confidentiality is maintained.

Where any breach of such confidentiality (including through the loss or theft of assessment materials) is either suspected by the NCTJ or alleged by any other person, the NCTJ will investigate that breach.

### **15. Candidate registrations**

Each candidate that registers with the NCTJ to take the NQJ qualification is uniquely identified by a Unique Reference Number (URN) generated by the NCTJ's database of learner records.

### **16. Qualification specification**

The NQJ is designed to examine all-round competence in a range of fundamental skills at a level appropriate to a newspaper journalist who has completed the basic training programme, including a properly supervised period of practical training. These skills include 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; to work to a deadline and to a stipulated length without sacrificing accuracy and vital content; to write in a clear, flowing style that attracts the reader with a good intro and story construction.

### **Mandatory units:**

Each section of the National Qualification in Journalism has a specific purpose:

#### **Media Law and Practice**

This is an examination in which candidates must demonstrate that they are conversant with day-to-day newspaper practice inside and outside the office, have a sound working knowledge of practical journalism enabling them to respond to any given editorial situation, are able to apply the principles of newspaper law, ethical practice and public affairs, and can brief senior and junior colleagues in clear, concise terms.

## **News Report**

Candidates produce a news story based on a speech and other information. They must demonstrate the ability to report the spoken word accurately, appreciate news values, and write a balanced summary of the speaker's words, using an appropriate number of quoted passages, to length and within deadline. They must also suggest story development ideas, relating to the news report story.

## **News Interview**

Candidates assimilate a briefing containing information from a number of different sources and consider 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.

## **E-Logbook for Journalists**

The object of the logbook is to ensure that all trainees gain sufficient experience during their first eighteen months at work to prepare them to take the NQJ 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, news editors and in-office trainers. The e-logbook will be examined and marked by the NCTJ.

Programme objectives and outcomes are found in the programme of study for each section which are published on the NCTJ website at [www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com)

## **17. Pass/Fail criteria**

To gain an overall pass in the NQJ, a candidate must achieve a combined mark of 240/400.

Each section of the NQJ is marked out of 100 marks.

If a candidate gains 60 marks or above they will automatically pass the section. Those who fall below 50 marks will automatically fail that section.

A candidate who gains a borderline mark of between 50 and 59 for a section will go into an aggregating process (final moderation) involving all other sections that make up the NQJ qualification – news interview, media law and practice and the reporter's e-logbook.

If a candidate has gained 60 marks or above in one, two or three NQJ sections, a candidate achieving a mark of 50-59 in any of the other sections will be awarded a pass for that section as long as he/she has achieved an overall score of 240/400.

If a candidate has not achieved an overall score of 240/400, then those sections gaining a mark of 50-59 will fail.

## **18. Grade descriptors**

### **News Interview**

#### **Distinction 70+**

All the essential facts have been included in an accessible, well-structured story with no inaccuracies. The candidate has chosen a compelling angle and produced a tightly written intro that carries real impact. Story construction is logical and aids understanding. The best

quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a high-level of journalistic skills and can be published with little or no correction.

#### **Merit 65-69**

The key facts, plus the majority of the other worthwhile facts, have been included with no inaccuracies. The candidate has chosen a strong angle and the intro is well written. Story construction is logical and aids understanding. Good quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a good level of journalistic skills and can be published with few, if any, changes.

#### **Pass 60-64**

Most of the key facts, plus most of the other worthwhile facts, have been included. Any inaccuracies will be minor and not change the thrust of the story. The candidate has chosen a good angle and the intro is satisfactorily written. The story has a sensible flow and can be easily understood. Acceptable quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a satisfactory level of journalistic skills and can be published without major changes.

### **News Report**

#### **Distinction 70+**

All the essential facts have been included in an accessible, well-structured story with no inaccuracies. The candidate has chosen a compelling angle and produced a tightly written intro that carries real impact. Story construction is logical and aids understanding. The best quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a high-level of journalistic skills and can be published with little or no correction. Follow-up ideas are valid and original with the correct sources identified; lines of questioning are broad and deep. Appropriate online, video and other digital opportunities have been listed.

#### **Merit 65-69**

The key facts, plus the majority of the other worthwhile facts, have been included with no inaccuracies. The candidate has chosen a strong angle and the intro is well written. Story construction is logical and aids understanding. Good quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a good level of journalistic skills and can be published with few changes. Good sources have been identified for follow-up ideas but the lines of questioning, although broad, have not been fully fleshed out. Appropriate online, video and other digital opportunities have been listed.

#### **Pass 60-64**

Most of the key facts, plus most of the other worthwhile facts, have been included. Any inaccuracies will be minor and not change the thrust of the story. The candidate has chosen a good angle and the intro is satisfactorily written. The story has a sensible flow and can be easily understood. Acceptable quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a satisfactory level of journalistic skills and can be published without major changes. Satisfactory sources have been identified for follow-up ideas but the lines of questioning have not been fully fleshed out. Satisfactory online, video and other digital opportunities have been listed.

### **E-logbook**

#### **Distinction 70+**

All the submissions contain the essential facts and the stories are written in an accessible, well-structured way, with no inaccuracies. The candidate has chosen compelling angles and produced tightly written intros that carry real impact. Story construction is logical and aids

understanding. The best quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a high-level of journalistic skills and can be published with little or no correction.

**Merit 65-69**

All the submissions contain the key facts, plus the majority of the other worthwhile facts, with no inaccuracies. The candidate has chosen strong angles and the intros are well written. Story construction is logical and aids understanding. Good quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a good level of journalistic skills and can be published with few changes.

**Pass 60-64**

All of the submissions contain most of the key facts, plus most of the other worthwhile facts. Any inaccuracies will be minor and not change the thrust of the story. The candidate has chosen satisfactory angles and the intros are satisfactory. Stories have a sensible flow and can be easily understood. Acceptable quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a satisfactory level of journalistic skills and can be published with only minor changes.

**Media Law and Practice**

**Distinction 70+**

The candidate has an excellent knowledge which they demonstrate to achieve the learning outcomes. The candidate provides excellent explanations with reference to relevant examples and practical application to local/national stories. There are no basic legal errors and no legal risks have been created in journalistic output. Provides significant evidence of analysis and application.

**Merit 65-69**

The candidate has a good knowledge which they demonstrate in practical work to achieve the learning outcomes. The candidate provides good explanations with reference to relevant examples and practical application to local/national stories. The candidate is very unlikely to make basic legal errors or create legal risks in journalistic output. Provides good evidence of analysis and application.

**Pass 60-64**

The candidate has a satisfactory knowledge which they demonstrate in practical work to achieve the learning outcomes. The candidate provides satisfactory explanations with reference to relevant examples and practical application to local/national stories. Candidate is unlikely to make basic legal errors or create legal risks in journalistic output. Provides evidence of analysis and application.