

**NATIONAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

**REPORTERS**

**Examiners' Report**

**MARCH 2008**

**NATIONAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION  
FOR REPORTERS  
MARCH 2008**

In March a total of 184 candidates sat the National Certificate Examination at 14 centres. The National Certificate was awarded to 105 candidates – a pass rate of 57 per cent.

**AWARD WINNERS**

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

Andrew McGill

Hunts Post

Andrew's confident, tightly written copy reflected a fluent, relaxed interview technique. He clearly took an interest in his interviewee and covered all aspects of the story in considerable depth. The overall result was a cracking read.

**ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)**

Nicola Park

North West Evening Mail

Nicola won the news report prize for her good solid reporting. Nicola succeeded in blending the key detail from the handout material with the speech to produce an accurate, comprehensive and easy to read story which flowed logically from intro to final par.

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

Katherine Vine

Manchester Metro News

Katherine combined a near-perfect answer on the law question with two very strong answers for the newspaper practice questions. Her law answer was clear, authoritative and methodical in approach. Her practice answers contained lots of imaginative, workable ideas. All in all a very impressive performance.

**NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)**

Gemma Peplow

Leicester Mercury

This logbook was excellently presented and submissions for all Key Tasks were of a very high standard, demonstrating the candidate's ability to cover a wide range of stories with confidence, flair and imagination.

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

<u>Name</u>		<u>Newspaper</u>
Lucinda	Adam	<i>Bucks Free Press</i>
Melanie	Adams	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>
Samuel	Adams	<i>Wanstead &amp; Woodford Guardian</i>
Paul	Ainsworth	<i>Newark Advertiser</i>
Victoria	Allen	<i>Redhill, Reigate &amp; Horley Life</i>
Catherine	Allen	<i>Mansfield Chad</i>
Owen Michael	Amos	<i>The Northern Echo</i>
Georgia	Anderson	<i>Hemel Hempstead Gazette</i>
Ellen Louise	Beardmore	<i>Pontefract &amp; Castleford Express</i>
Sarah	Bebbington	<i>Janes Information Group</i>
Jodie	Beecroft	<i>Bridlington Free press</i>
Jonathan	Bennett	<i>Kent &amp; Sussex Courier</i>
Susannah	Berry	<i>Wetherby News</i>
Andrew	Bond	<i>Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph</i>
Natalie	Bowyer	<i>Hunts Post</i>
Bethan Louise	Burke	<i>North West Evening Mail</i>
Jemma	Callow	<i>Banbury Guardian</i>
William	Carson	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>
Richard	Catton	<i>Ripon Gazette</i>
Ailsa	Chalk	<i>Sidmouth Herald</i>
Lucy Diana Georgina	Clapham	<i>Bucks Free Press</i>
Emma Louise	Clark	<i>St Albans Observer</i>
Samantha	Clark	<i>West Sussex County Times</i>
Monique	Cleaver	<i>Northants Evening Telegraph</i>
Ruth	Clegg	<i>Lancashire Publications Ltd</i>
Helen	Collis	<i>Western Morning News</i>
Dolores Patricia	Cowburn	<i>Jersey Evening Post</i>
Laura	Cummings	<i>Dunfermline Press</i>
Laura Elizabeth	Dale	<i>Herald Express</i>
James	Davis	<i>Stroud News &amp; Journal</i>
John	Deehan	<i>Burnley Express</i>
Crispin	Dowler	<i>Inside Housing</i>
Colin	Drury	<i>The Halifax Courier</i>
Alexander	Ellis	<i>Thurrock Gazette</i>
Chris	Fay	<i>The Northern Echo</i>
Megan Elizabeth	Featherstone	<i>The Halifax Courier</i>
Nicola	Fenwick	<i>Darlington &amp; Stockton Times</i>
Alexandra	Forsyth	<i>The News, Portsmouth</i>
James	Forsyth	<i>The Echo, Basildon</i>
Joseph	Garbe	<i>Advertiser &amp; Review</i>
Timothy	Green	<i>Bucks Herald</i>
Michael	Greenwell	<i>Nottingham Evening Post</i>

<u>Name</u>		<u>Newspaper</u>
Naomi Christine Jane	Harris	<i>Express &amp; Echo, Exeter</i>
John	Harrison	<i>Watford Observer</i>
Sian	Harrison	<i>Hull Daily Mail</i>
Lisa	Higginson	<i>Westmorland Gazette</i>
Jennifer Lydia	Hollamby	<i>Oldham Evening Chronicle</i>
Christopher	Hudson	<i>Macclesfield Express</i>
Callum	Jones	<i>The Bucks Herald</i>
Emma	Judd	<i>South Wales Evening Post</i>
Lawrence Thomas	Kennedy	<i>News Shopper</i>
Adam	King	<i>The Bucks Herald</i>
Christopher	Kirk	<i>Newark Advertiser</i>
David	Knapper	<i>Leek Post &amp; Times</i>
James	Knock	<i>Gloucestershire Echo</i>
Elizabeth	Lee	<i>Chronicle &amp; Echo</i>
David	Lindsell	<i>Aldershot News</i>
Debbie	Lockett	<i>Worksop Guardian</i>
Alistair	Mackay	<i>Kirkintilloch Herald</i>
Warren	Manger	<i>Coventry Evening Telegraph</i>
Ashley	Marshall	<i>Harrogate Advertiser</i>
Jonathan	Matfin	<i>Hemel Hempstead Gazette</i>
Ian Robert	McDonald	<i>Dorset Echo</i>
Kenneth Francis	McErlain	<i>Rugby Advertiser</i>
Louise	McEvoy	<i>The Comet</i>
Andrew	McGill	<i>Hunts Post</i>
Asha	Mehta	<i>Peterborough Evening Telegraph</i>
Daniel	Menhinnitt	<i>Croydon Guardian</i>
Andrew	Miller	<i>Newark Advertiser</i>
John	Morgan	<i>Cambridge Evening News</i>
Catherine	Morris	<i>Diss Express</i>
Claire	Moulson	<i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>
Anna	Nalborczyk	<i>Hereford Times</i>
David	Paine	<i>Worcester News</i>
James Robert	Pallatt	<i>Nottingham Evening Post</i>
Nicola	Park	<i>North West Evening Mail</i>
Nathaniel Merlin	Parsons	<i>Ham &amp; High</i>
Gemma	Peplow	<i>Leicester Mercury</i>
Michael	Pickard	<i>Watford Observer</i>
Andrew	Pitt	<i>Malton &amp; Pickering Mercury</i>
Graham	Poucher	<i>Wakefield Express</i>
Louise	Psyllides	<i>The Sentinel</i>
Laura	Rands	<i>Ilkeston Advertiser</i>
Tim	Raw	<i>West Sussex County Times</i>
Ross	Robertson	<i>Sunderland Echo</i>
Thomas	Rowley	<i>Tameside Advertiser</i>
Suzanne	Rutter	<i>The Halifax Courier</i>

<u>Name</u>		<u>Newspaper</u>
Christopher	Slavin	<i>Newbury Weekly News</i>
Laura Alison	Smith	<i>The Echo, Basildon</i>
Helen	Smithson	<i>News Guardian</i>
Christopher Joel	Sweet	<i>Western Gazette</i>
Daniel	Thompson	<i>Middleton Guardian</i>
Joel N	Turner	<i>Leeds Weekly News</i>
Richard	Vernalls	<i>Kidderminster Shuttle &amp; Times</i>
Katherine Rachel	Vine	<i>Manchester Metro News</i>
Christopher	Visser	<i>North West Evening Mail</i>
Lizanne	Weafer	<i>Stroud News &amp; Journal</i>
Allister	Webb	<i>Driffield Times</i>
Gemma	Wheatley	<i>Croydon Guardian</i>
Graeme	Wilkinson	<i>Carmarthen Journal</i>
Karen	Wilson	<i>Bury Free Press</i>
Stuart	Woledge	<i>Sevenoaks Chronicle</i>
Claire	Woods	<i>Pulman's Weekly News &amp; Advertiser Series</i>
Andrew	Woolfoot	<i>Wiltshire &amp; Gloucester Standard</i>
Edward	Wrenn	<i>Northants Evening Telegraph</i>

## CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

With the National Certificate Examination being held three times for the first time this year, it will be interesting to see how this affects the number of candidates sitting and the pass rate. There was a reduction in the number of candidates sitting the spring exam due to fewer resits; the number of first-time candidates was in line with previous exams. The overall pass rate of 57 per cent from a total entry of 184 candidates for the spring exam is very much in line with previous pass rates.

Without doubt the most pleasing figure was the number of candidates retaking the exam who achieved a pass – 70 per cent. This was significantly higher than pass rates for resit candidates over the past three years.

The logbook pass rate gets ever closer to 100 per cent. It stood at 98 per cent this time, which is excellent news.

The news report proved to be the most difficult element, with only 60 per cent getting a pass mark, despite the topical subject matter and plentiful supply of good quotes, strong statistics and choice of angles.

The newspaper practice paper, which tested knowledge of libel, contempt, the identification of young offenders, anonymity for the victims of sexual offences and the PCC code, brought a 66 per cent pass rate. The approach to some questions, a lack of understanding of the law and time management in the exam were among the reasons given for some of the failures. This suggests that some candidates were ill-prepared.

In the interview section, 72 per cent of candidates passed. Although the story was simple and relatively straightforward, it required – as always – good structure and a high level of detail. It was rewarding to see plenty of strong intros and many examples of a logical approach that included a mix of accurate quotes and reported speech.

I am satisfied that the degree of difficulty in all these elements has once again proved a challenging test of a candidate's ability.

Congratulations to all those who earned the badge of seniority. My thanks go to the examiners for their thoroughness and dedication to applying a consistent standard of marking across the four elements.

## NEWS INTERVIEW – 159 candidates; 115 passed – 72%

The March 2008 NCE news interview continued the web-first policy introduced last year and asked candidates to write an online story that would appear within two hours of them being briefed.

Candidates again found no problems with this format, a fact borne out by the positive pass rate, and it is a testament to editors around the country who are obviously grooming their trainees to write for both print and the web.

The story was about the early morning theft of lead flashing from the roof of St Andrew's Church in Capham. Candidates spoke to the church vicar (minister if in Scotland) and wrote 400-word stories to appear on the website of the *Capham Courier*. While the medium of publication was for the web, the exam was still designed to test the core skills of interviewing, note-taking and news writing.

The brief provided basic information from a press appeal on the local police website asking for help in finding the thieves, plus background information from the UK Police website about

the theft of scrap metal from a variety of buildings and venues across the country. Further updates and sorting out appropriate web links were to be carried out by the newsdesk.

Candidates were required to interview the vicar (minister if in Scotland) Andy Clark (if a woman, Andrea) and get enough information to write a vigorous and well balanced story.

The core angle was clearly the theft of lead flashing from the roof of St Andrew's Church which had happened only hours earlier at around 5am. There were a number of different lines the candidate could take in addition to the theft.

There was the obvious line about the cost of the lead that had been stolen and the financial implications of the repairs. Some candidates picked up on a strong quote given by the vicar (minister if in Scotland) about the theft being an 'abomination' and used this as the thrust of the intro.

There was another strong line as one of the three thieves had fallen from the roof and had left a 'pool of blood' at the scene.

Examiners were happy to reward all these angles provided they were well supported by a strong story structure, but the few candidates who chose a more hackneyed 'police are searching for...' angle were not viewed in a positive light.

Some candidates used a different angle in conjunction with the core angle of the theft:

- the vicar (minister if in Scotland) said services and community groups using the church would be disrupted because forecast rain would get into the body of the building
- the vicar (minister if in Scotland) was also proposing a two-mile protest march and a candle-lit vigil to 'demonstrate the power of good versus the evil actions of the criminals'.

Whatever approach was taken, it was important the angle was well supported. Examiners penalised candidates who, for instance, used the march and vigil in the intro but then did not make any further reference to them until the final part of the story.

There was a timing issue in writing the story. Some candidates used phrases like 'the theft happened at 5am' but did not give the exact day. Examiners preferred stories that were more precise but did not penalise the less exact approach. Examiners were conscious that some newspaper websites display the time and date that stories are uploaded and so less precise stories were given the benefit of the doubt.

This was a straightforward story and therefore a high level of detail was required. Examiners were looking for a brief summary that captured the drama of the theft and the discovery of a ladder, a pool of blood and broken slates. Descriptions of the three thieves were available along with the van used to take away the stolen lead. Most candidates achieved this but those who did not were penalised accordingly.

Examiners were looking for at least three strong quotes and rewarded those candidates who used them to add pace and rhythm to their stories. A good shorthand note is required to be a good interviewer but minor variations in quotes were not penalised.

Good interview technique is the foundation on which all stories are built – whether writing for a weekly, a daily or hourly on the web – and that is the test of this exam. Although the interview itself is not assessed, a good technique will invariably result in a better story and there were many examples of this.

Overall, markers were looking for stories with a strong intro using dynamic verbs and adjectives, a key quote early in the story followed by an organised, logical approach which included a mix of accurate quotes and reported speech. There were plenty of these stories

and examiners applaud the candidates, and their trainers and editors, for meeting the challenge.

## **NEWS REPORT – 165 candidates; 99 passed – 60%**

News report featured one of the most topical national issues at the present time - teenage binge-drinking. Candidates were told that the Government had just revealed national statistics showing the number of teenagers needing medical treatment after binge-drinking had risen by nearly 15 per cent since the introduction of 24-hour licensing (or changes in licensing hours in Scotland). They were given comments from the chief constable of Accleton City Police and the chief executive of the Greater Accleton NHS Trust, together with a press release from the city's Alcoholics Anonymous branch.

The speech was given by the city's Conservative MP (MSP if in Scotland) Sir David Rodgers (Lady Davina Rodgers if a woman) in response to the Government statistics.

Key details the candidates needed in their stories included:

- MP (MSP if in Scotland) to ask questions in Parliament the following week with the intention of seeking £2million additional Government funding for the city's over-stretched emergency services to cover the cost of dealing with teenage binge-drinking
- There is more drunken vandalism and anti-social behaviour in Accleton than in most other towns and cities in the UK
- Statistics for the previous Saturday night, of which three-quarters related to inebriated teenagers
- Police service stretched to its limit and an ambulance service having to call for assistance from neighbouring NHS trusts
- £2m cost of addressing the effects of teenage binge-drinking in Accleton
- Police threat to shut down any licensed premises selling alcohol to youngsters

The material provided potential for a front page lead and many candidates produced hard-hitting stories which covered all the key points, included strong emotive quotes and gave a good mix of the hand-out material and speech.

The markers found a disappointing number of candidates who did not think the statistics relating to Saturday night should be included, or ignored the MP's (MSP's if in Scotland) plan to demand £2million more cash from the Government for the city's emergency services. Editors would not be happy if their reporters ignored such essential detail.

The usual bunch of errors crept in. Mis-spelling of names and places which were given in the written brief was inexcusable. Accleton became Accelton, Appleton and even Acton.

Similarly the MP (MSP if in Scotland) Sir David Rodgers was described as Sir Rodgers, Sir Rogers or even Mr Rodgers. It was worrying that so many candidates did not know how to refer to someone with a title, even on occasion compounding this error by leaving the 'd' out of his name.

Quotes were generally well identified but poor shorthand was again a problem for some candidates. Shorthand is a key skill of a good reporter and the markers can't emphasise enough the need to keep it up to a minimum of 100wpm. Trainees would be well-advised to undergo shorthand refresher training in the run-up to their NCE.

Some of the mistakes encountered by the markers would have been picked up by the candidates if they had allowed themselves time to read through their stories.

Those candidates who passed this exam deserve to be congratulated on their efforts. They demonstrated sound reporting and good news sense.

## **NEWSPAPER PRACTICE** – 147 candidates; 97 passed - 66%

Candidates performed generally very well on this paper, though marks were not as high as they were last year.

The issues in the law questions were fairly basic – libel, contempt, the identification of young offenders, anonymity for the victims of sexual offences and the PCC code. These are all issues that are commonplace in newsrooms. They are also problems which cost newspapers considerable amounts of time and money should a journalist fall foul of them. Therefore, when dealing with such central issues, the moderator and markers set a high bar for candidates answering the questions. If they cannot answer these questions comfortably, are they ready to be a senior reporter?

Candidates who did not achieve a pass mark generally did not show sufficient understanding of the risks of libel, contempt, anonymity of sex offence victims and the PCC code.

Candidates also lost marks where they failed to demonstrate their understanding of defences, such as qualified privilege, against a libel action. Some candidates suggested that an official police statement was not covered by qualified privilege, which it is. Another candidate suggested that the defence would fail because reporting that a magistrate had groomed a child over the internet was ‘not in the public interest’.

Some candidates were a little confused over group libel and suggested that all magistrates could sue as a result of this story, which is obviously not the case.

As for the PCC code, candidates sitting the NCE are strongly advised to use the PCC website – [www.pcc.org.uk](http://www.pcc.org.uk) as part of their preparation. This site not only includes a detailed explanation of the code of practice itself, but also details of recent adjudications. The chief moderator for newspaper practice pays close attention to this site and recent cases when setting questions.

On the newspaper practice questions, there were some strong performances where candidates demonstrated imagination, thoroughness and professionalism.

Candidates would not be marked down for stating the obvious, such as interviewing the main subject of the story. It might seem an obvious move, but unless a candidate says they will do it, they cannot be awarded marks for it. Similarly, if a candidate is suggesting interviewing someone who might be deemed to be unlikely to talk to them, an indication of how they would gain the interview will get them more marks.

Candidates must indicate not only who they would speak to, but also what they would ask them. An indication of lines of questioning allows markers to gauge what would be made of a story and award more marks accordingly. They cannot award the marks if no lines of questioning are detailed.

Once again, time management was clearly an issue for some candidates, although perhaps fewer than in previous sittings. Candidates should keep a close eye on the clock and give themselves enough time to do themselves justice in all the questions, not just the law.

The markers and moderator congratulate those who passed the newspaper practice paper this time and hope this report will assist those who didn’t in any future efforts.

**LOGBOOK** — 132 candidates; 129 passed — 98%

There were 128 logbooks submitted for the first time and 125 of them (98%) were passed. Four more were re-submitted after failing in September 2007: all were passed.

The high success rate reflects once again the efforts put in by candidates and their trainers throughout the country.

Of the three candidates who failed this time, two did so because they omitted to provide all the required evidence that they had satisfactorily completed the Key Tasks, or submitted cuttings and original copy that did not match. Candidates are reminded that original material on which stories are based must be submitted for Key Task 1 (Handout), and that trainees working in Scotland who are unable to cover fatal accident inquiries for Key Task 7, must submit alternative copy as laid down in the current logbook guidelines. The third logbook to fail included a seriously inaccurate submission for Key Task 5 (Numeracy).

Some concern was expressed by markers at the number of newspapers which appear to allow trainees' copy to be published word-for-word as originally written, without any evidence of sub-editing. The examiners are anxious that there should be no question about the authenticity of original copy and urge candidates to note the requirement that all original copy should be endorsed as such by trainers. Future submissions may be failed if they do not fulfil this requirement.

**National Certificate Examination for Reporters**  
Comparative figures



	APR 2005	OCT 2005	APR 2006	OCT 2006	MAR 2007	SEPT 2007	MAR 2008
<b>TOTAL ENTRY</b>							
No of candidates	280	234	277	284	254	200	184
No of passes	155	116	129	143	127	130	105
No of failures	125	118	148	141	127	70	79
<b>% passed</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>57</b>

<b>FIRST TIMERS</b>							
No of candidates	177	127	175	159	129	98	128
No of passes	95	49	82	68	49	67	66
No of failures	82	78	93	91	80	31	62
<b>% passed</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>52</b>

<b>RETAKES</b>							
No of candidates	103	107	102	125	125	102	56
No of passes	61	50	47	75	77	63	39
No of failures	42	57	55	50	48	39	17
<b>% passed</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>70</b>

**National Certificate Examination for Reporters**  
Analysis of figures for each exam section (first-timers and resits)

	APR 2005	OCT 2005	APR 2006	OCT 2006	MAR 2007	JULY 2007*	SEPT 2007	MAR 2008
<b>NEWS INTERVIEW</b>								
No of candidates	243	182	230	231	198		160	159
No of passes	175	113	139	146	130		118	115
No of failures	68	69	91	85	68		42	44
<b>% passed</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>66</b>		<b>74</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>NEWS REPORT</b>								
No of candidates	230	189	234	233	204		188	165
No of passes	156	121	141	149	100		140	99
No of failures	74	68	93	84	104		48	66
<b>% passed</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>49</b>		<b>74</b>	<b>60</b>

<b>NEWSPAPER PRACTICE</b>								
No of candidates	259	194	253	256	223	46	126	147
No of passes	177	101	140	144	150	35	99	97
No of failures	82	93	113	112	73	11	27	50
<b>% passed</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>66</b>

<b>LOGBOOK</b>								
No of candidates	184	137	180	162	140		103	132
No of passes	173	128	172	154	134		99	129
No of failures	11	9	8	8	6		4	3
<b>% passed</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>96</b>		<b>96</b>	<b>98</b>

\* July 2007 newspaper practice resit only. Nine candidates re-sat and passed the newspaper practice exam and passed the NCE having previously passed the other three sections in earlier sittings.