

**NATIONAL QUALIFICATION
IN JOURNALISM**

Examiners' Report

March 2016

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

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In March, a total of 69 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at eight centres across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 51 candidates – a pass rate of 74 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

TED BOTTOMLEY AWARD (MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – £250)

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Luke Sproule

Oxford Mail

An excellent paper that was strong in all areas and well written. Luke gained all 40 marks for Question 1 and just missed full marks for Question 2. In Question 3 he demonstrated good understanding of the problems such a scenario would throw up and the need for sensitivity. In all answers the legal and ethical problems were spotted, the correct law and ethical decisions applied and right conclusions were drawn. On top of that, Luke made good use of case studies, which he applied to the scenarios. Congratulations!

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

Francesca Gillett

South Wales Argus

Francesca's excellent choice of content, selected from both the brief and the speech, was all reported accurately in a lively, easy-to-read story which held the reader's attention from intro to final par. She included full accurate quotes, demonstrating good shorthand and news sense. Part B further demonstrated her news sense with strong ideas for taking the story further.

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

Simon Murfitt

Brentwood Gazette

Simon's interview paper stood out from the rest. He captured the drama while at the same time weaving in lots of detail to make it an excellent read. His copy was logical and the chronology made it easy for the reader to understand the story. He also included some strong quotes. Congratulations.

NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)

Rachel Conner

The Northern Echo

A remarkable example of an award-winning logbook that gained extremely high marks thanks largely to a variety of maximum scores in a number of key tasks. Markers were especially impressed with the impressive story structure and good use of quotes throughout.

Key tasks which stood out particularly were: family events, human interest, courts and features. Markers would have no hesitation in highlighting the entire logbook as a good example to all those preparing to make a submission. An excellent logbook.

The following candidates, listed in alphabetical order by surname, have now gained the National Qualification in Journalism.

Stuart	Anderson	<i>The News, Portsmouth</i>
Christopher	Anderson	<i>The Reading Chronicle</i>
Anthony	Barej	<i>Hertfordshire Mercury</i>
Rachel	Barr	<i>Crawley News & East Grinstead Courier</i>
Sophie	Biddle	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
James	Byrne	<i>Congleton Chronicle</i>
Eleanor	Cambridge	<i>Surrey Comet</i>
Andrew	Colley	<i>Bucks Free Press</i>
Rachel	Conner	<i>The Northern Echo</i>
Phoebe	Cooke	<i>Newham Recorder</i>
Patrick	Dinham	<i>Hertfordshire Mercury</i>
Anna	Dove	<i>The Scotsman</i>
Katie	French	<i>Mid Devon Gazette</i>
Elizabeth	Fry	<i>Burton Mail</i>
Duncan	Geddes	<i>Hampshire Chronicle</i>
Francesca	Gillett	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Judith	Hawkins	<i>Grantham Journal</i>
Kirsty	Hough	<i>Braintree & Witham Times</i>
Ian Paul	Johnson	<i>The Scarborough News</i>
Jack	Johnson	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Ciaran	Kelly	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Andrew	Lawton	<i>Gazette & Herald</i>
John	Lucas	<i>Braintree & Witham Times</i>
Kieran	Lynch	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Sophie	Madden	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Amy-Clare	Martin	<i>Kent & Sussex Courier</i>
Ed	McConnell	<i>Kent Messenger</i>
Matthew	McKew	<i>Isle of Wight County Press</i>
Briana	Millett	<i>Weston Worle & Somerset Mercury</i>
Simon	Murfitt	<i>Brentwood Gazette</i>
Sebastian	Murphy-Bates	<i>Barking & Dagenham Post</i>
George	Odling	<i>The Richmond & Twickenham Times</i>
Ruth	Ovens	<i>Wells Journal</i>
Ian	Parker	<i>Suffolk Free Press</i>
Christopher	Peddy	<i>Derby Telegraph</i>
Joshua	Pennington	<i>Winsford & Middlewich Guardian</i>
Eleanor	Perkins	<i>East Kent Mercury</i>
Eleanor	Pipe	<i>Sidmouth Herald</i>
Annabel	Rusbridge-Thomas	<i>Kent Messenger</i>
Mark	Shales	<i>Newham Recorder</i>
Rebecca Louise	Shepherd	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Florence	Snead	<i>Cambridge News</i>
Luke	Sproule	<i>Oxford Mail</i>

Rebecca Louise
Georgina
Toby
William
Harriet
Joseph
Daniel
Sarah

Taylor
Townshend
Wadey
Walker
Whitehead
Wilkes
Wright
Yates

Wandsworth Guardian
Surrey Advertiser
Bournemouth Daily Echo
Newbury Weekly News
Scunthorpe Telegraph
Mid Somerset Newspapers
Kentish Gazette
Bury Times & The Bolton News

CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

A record pass rate of 74 per cent was achieved in the March sitting of the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ).

A total of 51 of the 69 candidates were successful in all four sections – media law and practice, news report, interview and e-logbook – and achieved senior status.

This was the highest pass rate in the ten sittings since the NQJ was introduced three years ago to replace the National Certificate in Journalism (NCE). The previous highest pass rate of 72 per cent was recorded in March last year.

Chief examiner Steve Nelson said: “The pass rate had dipped to 61 per cent in both of the previous two sittings, so I am delighted to see this improvement.”

“The best figures came from the media law and practice section, and this reflects the increased focus on legal and ethical issues by the NCTJ, following the Leveson inquiry and introduction of IPSO.”

“The only disappointment was the failure of several candidates to complete the e-logbook correctly, resulting in overall fails.”

Special congratulations go to the four prize-winners, who each receive £250: Luke Sproule (*Oxford Mail*) for media law and practice; Francesca Gillett (*South Wales Argus*) for news report; Simon Murfitt (*Brentwood Gazette*) for news interview, and Rachel Connor (*The Northern Echo*) for e-logbook.

MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 59 candidates; 53 passed – 90 per cent

Another good set of results with a very worthy award-winning paper.

Contempt and defamation were tested in questions one and two and most candidates showed a good understanding of the problems involved. It was pleasing to see that most candidates spotted the danger of retweeting a defamatory inference in question one and that a number realised the scenario was similar to that involving Sally Bercow and Lord McAlpine.

The NQJ is a test of a reporter's skills and knowledge and whether he or she can be considered a senior, which means they need to be up-to-date on law and ethics. It was disappointing that a number of candidates seemed unaware that reporting restrictions of preliminary hearings before magistrates now comes under section 52a of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Section 39 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 has now been replaced in adult criminal courts by Section 45 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. As this is a relatively new change candidates were not penalised stating the old law, but it was pleasing to see that many were aware of the change.

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) has been operating for more than a year and its adjudications will come into play more and more in future exams. However, it is important to be aware of some of the old Press Complaints Commission's (PCC) landmark rulings.

A new *Editors' Code of Practice* was published at the beginning of the year and many candidates were aware of this, however, those who used the old clause numbers were not penalised.

The marks for question three were a little disappointing, with the pass rate decreasing compared to the previous two exams. The scenario was based on a recent IPSO adjudication involving the *Lincolnshire Echo's* coverage of a couple killed in the Tunisian terror attack. Candidates needed to apply Clause 1 (accuracy) and Clause 4 (intrusion into grief and shock) and realise that neither have a public interest override that would justify a breach. Examiners were looking for suggestions on how to get official verification of the deaths before either publishing or trying to contact the family.

Overall, most candidates answered the questions concisely, but there were numerous examples of confused thinking.

Once again, candidates with a good writing style and a logical approach tended to do better. A bullet-point approach to answers is recommended, but candidates will not be penalised if they do not adopt this practice.

Examiners recommend that, as well as attending an NQJ refresher, future candidates return to the latest edition of *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists* to brush up on defamation and contempt dangers and defences, which will always be tested, and court reporting restrictions. Regular visits to IPSO and PCC adjudications and the *Editors' Code*, along with the Judicial Studies Board's Reporting Restrictions in the Criminal Courts, would also be helpful. As would reading *HoldTheFrontPage* and *Press Gazette*.

For those of you who passed, congratulations, and for those who did not, plenty of revision, and good luck with your next attempt.

NEWS REPORT – 66 candidates; 52 passed – 79 per cent

A top girls' school poised to open its doors to boys, in a bid to solve the country's shortage of scientists and engineers, seemed to hit the spot with many candidates. There was a higher percentage of passes, with more candidates gaining merits than in past exams.

Carelessness, laziness and weak shorthand continue to be the main problems that markers encounter in the news report section.

There is no excuse for getting details and names in the brief wrong in the copy, such as the name of the school or saying that planning permission was being applied for when it had already been granted. This lowers the reputation of the newspaper and website in the eyes of its readers.

Weak shorthand continues to pose problems with errors in transcription, missed phrases and key words, or leaving the candidate guessing when trying to read back what they have taken down. There was a distinct tendency in March for candidates to guess at direct quotes, keeping a similar meaning, but definitely not verbatim. This is a bad habit which will eventually lead to a major mistake on the job. There is no excuse for not keeping shorthand up to speed.

In recent years shorthand has become steadily weaker. A speed of 100wpm when passing the diploma has tailed off during 18 months on-the-job and too many candidates are not picking up on this, presenting themselves for the NQJ with abilities well below the speed needed. With the news report speech varying between 90 and 120wpm it is essential trainees work on their shorthand during their on-the-job period, not just maintaining their speed, but improving it.

Laziness was particularly apparent in part B where, instead of coming up with a range of good ideas in section four, candidates opted to reply on Facebook and Twitter to fish for people to contact them with suggestions and comments. A good journalist will know where to go for follow-up ideas and seek them out personally. Facebook and Twitter are good journalistic tools but need to be used in conjunction with the traditional skills, not in place of them.

The message that comes back from the markers this time is: get shorthand up to speed and ensure that information from the brief is used accurately in the story.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 61 candidates; 47 passed – 77 per cent

This was a dramatic story about an attack on a train. Three men punched a female conductor when she asked for their tickets. They took her ticket machine and then beat a male passenger, who went to intervene, around the head leaving him with serious injuries.

The three then pulled the emergency handle, bringing the train to a halt. They jumped off the train and escaped over fields.

Candidates needed to pull all the drama together and include key details: the men had been drinking; the passenger's wife's plea for the public's help; and the conductor's quote. However, some candidates failed to grasp the chronology and their stories jumped around too much. Several interview assessors noted some candidates' questioning was haphazard and this was shown in copy which was unstructured.

Others missed out too many details. One did not include the name of the person they were interviewing and some missed what happened to the men and how they escaped from the train.

Others wrote too much and lost valuable marks as a result.

Again, shorthand appeared to be an issue, and spelling and grammar could have been better. The usual howlers: fair instead of fare; break instead of brake.

Accuracy was an issue as some candidates even got place names wrong. There were also words missing, which indicated that the candidate had not read through copy thoroughly before submitting.

Overall, some candidates just did not seem to be able to picture the story before they put the words on the page, ending with a disjointed attempt at what was a dramatic story.

Those who passed had good chronology and a readable writing style, caught the drama and had strong quotes.

E-LOGBOOK – 55 candidates; 50 passed – 91 per cent

The March e-logbook submissions were generally good, but, while almost all candidates had a clear understanding of what was required in the compilation of this category, there are still some who failed both because content was missing and because their submissions did not match the criteria of the key task.

It is unusual for the latter to occur so we would urge all candidates and trainers to make sure that they fully understand what is required for the key task submissions and if they are in any doubt to please ask.

Once again there was also the problem of a number of candidates failing to upload either a published story or original copy for their key tasks, leading to duplicated submissions.

Markers must be able to see both submissions to make a judgement on the key task and such duplication will be marked as a fail on the key task and therefore on the e-logbook overall. Three candidates failed as a result of this. Once again, we cannot stress enough, that candidates should

double-check, and, if possible, so should an editor or trainer, to ensure the correct copy has been uploaded throughout.

We are also at pains to point out that e-logbooks must also be submitted on time and in accordance with the date set by the NCTJ. Any future late submissions will be considered to have missed the deadline and, therefore, to be marked as a fail.

It must be said, however, that the vast majority of entrants have passed this category and there have been some excellent examples of key task entries. Our e-logbook award winner, Rachel Conner, is a worthy recipient in a cohort which had strong entries.

As always we encourage anyone who has any issues compiling their logbook to speak to their editor/trainer, or to the NCTJ, and we will be happy to give advice.

National Qualification in Journalism – comparative figures

	MAR 2013	JUL 2013	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016
TOTAL ENTRY	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>
No of candidates	110	102	88	90	69	71	90	72	71	69
No of passes	59	50	54	60	50	48	65	44	43	51
No of failures	51	52	34	30	19	23	25	28	28	18
% passed	54	49	62	67	72	68	72	61	61	74

FIRST-TIMERS										
No of candidates	66	51	49	55	48	52	65	49	51	50
No of passes	33	32	32	38	35	33	49	28	33	36
No of failures	33	19	17	17	13	19	16	21	18	14
% passed	50	63	65	69	73	64	75	57	65	72

RE-SITS										
No of candidates	44	51	39	35	21	19	25	23	20	19
No of passes	26	18	22	22	15	15	16	16	10	15
No of failures	18	33	17	13	6	4	9	7	10	4
% passed	59	35	56	63	71	79	64	70	50	79

Analysis of figures for each exam section (first-timers and re-sits)
(Pre March 2013 figures are for the old-style National Certificate Examination)

	MAR 2013	JUL 2013	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016
NEWS INTERVIEW										
No of candidates	99	89	71	75	61	65	78	63	59	61
No of passes	53	58	54	57	49	53	63	49	43	47
No of failures	46	31	17	18	12	12	15	14	16	14
% passed	54	65	76	76	80	82	81	78	73	77

NEWS REPORT										
No of candidates	103	96	79	83	67	69	88	70	68	66
No of passes	49	57	52	57	50	47	66	45	44	52
No of failures	54	39	27	26	17	22	22	25	24	14
% passed	48	59	66	69	75	68	75	64	65	79

MEDIA LAW & PRACTICE										
No of candidates	97	86	86	83	54	61	81	61	60	59
No of passes	55	37	59	71	42	47	67	47	45	53
No of failures	42	49	27	12	12	14	14	14	15	6
% passed	57	43	69	86	78	77	83	77	75	90

LOGBOOK										
No of candidates	66	51	51	55	48	54	65	49	56	55
No of passes	65	49	51	54	46	54	65	42	53	50
No of failures	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	7	3	5
% passed	98	96	100	98	96	100	100	86	95	91