

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

July 2015

NCTJ LEVEL 5 NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

July 2015

In July, a total of 72 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) across eight centres. The NQJ was awarded to 44 candidates – a pass rate of 61 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

TED BOTTOMLEY AWARD (MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – £250) **Sponsored by Midland News Association**

Imogen Blake

Ham & High

This was a joy of a script. Imogen used bullet points to answer the questions, which were well written and easy for the examiner to mark. There were no weak parts to her answers, which showed not only good knowledge of the law and ethics but also how they related to the scenarios and practical ways of dealing with the problems thrown up. Her first answer was just one mark short of the maximum available and the other two both scored highly. Congratulations.

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

Sarah Robinson

Weston, Worle & Somerset Mercury

Sarah managed to keep a complicated story simple and produced an easy-to-read story containing all the relevant facts, interspersed with accurate quotes. Part B was tackled in a thorough way with excellent ideas provided for developing the story. A deserving winner of this award.

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

Rob Lowson

Telegraph & Argus

Rob produced a very good story. His introduction captured the drama straight away and he followed with a readable chronology of the events. His story flowed very well and he continued the drama without using too many adjectives. The copy was backed up with some key quotes which enhanced the story. Well done.

NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)

Joanna Morris

The Northern Echo

This was an excellent logbook and one which was memorable for some quite engrossing reporting. A number of key tasks attracted maximum marks including human interest, family events and inquiries/tribunals and it is not hard to see why they were rewarded so richly. Along with some very strong stories, this logbook also features some excellent writing, none more so than the recollection of a traumatic personal experience recalled some years later. Joanna is a worthy winner of the award.

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

Forename	Surname	Company
Esme Louise	Ashcroft	<i>Bristol Post</i>
Aidan	Barlow	<i>Kentish Gazette</i>
Jessica	Bave	<i>Basingstoke Gazette</i>
Michael	Benke	<i>Swindon Advertiser</i>
Imogen	Blake	<i>Ham & High</i>
Bess	Browning	<i>Faversham News</i>
Daniel	Cain	<i>Worthing Herald</i>
Nicholas	Carding	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Laura	Cartledge	<i>Chichester Observer</i>
Louisa	Clarence-Smith	<i>Wimbledon Guardian</i>
Daniel	Clark	<i>Herald Express</i>
Beren	Cross	<i>Swindon Advertiser</i>
Gareth	Davies	<i>The Argus</i>
Eleanor	Davis	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Robert	Doman	NWN Media
Greg	Farrimond	<i>Wigan Evening Post</i>
Samantha	Fisher	<i>Leicester Mercury</i>
Christopher	Flanagan	<i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>
Rebecca	Flood	<i>The News Shopper</i>
Harvey John	Gavin	<i>Sidmouth Herald</i>
Chiara	Giordano	<i>The Herald, Plymouth</i>
Amie	Gordon	<i>Midhurst and Petworth Observer</i>
Rob	Lowson	<i>Telegraph & Argus</i>

Ben	Lugg	<i>Stratford-upon-Avon Herald</i>
Peter	Madeley	<i>Express & Star</i>
Alexander	McIntyre	<i>Congleton Chronicle</i>
Sabah	Meddings	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Simon	Meechan	<i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>
Joanna	Morris	<i>The Northern Echo</i>
Sophie	Morton	<i>Newham Recorder</i>
Thomas Alexander	Morton	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Charlotte Louise	Neal	<i>Hampshire Chronicle</i>
David	Parker	<i>Newark Advertiser</i>
Rebecca	Pike	<i>Canterbury Times</i>
Sophie Grace	Prideaux	<i>Bristol Post</i>
Sarah	Robinson	<i>Weston, Worle & Somerset Mercury</i>
Chloe	Smith	<i>The Cornishman</i>
Harley	Tamplin	<i>West Sussex County Times</i>
Carys	Thomas	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Berny	Torre	<i>Crawley Observer</i>
James	Walker	<i>Kent Messenger</i>
Rhian	Waller	NWN Media
William	Watkinson	<i>Essex Chronicle</i>
Richard	Welch	<i>South Wales Evening Post</i>

CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

The pass rate for the July 2015 sitting of the National Qualification in Journalism fell by 11 percentage points compared with the previous sitting, to a two-year low of 61 per cent.

A total of 44 out of 72 candidates were successful, earning senior reporter status.

Chief examiner Steve Nelson said: "It is disappointing to see the pass rate slip to its lowest since July 2013. This was, in part, due to seven candidates – 14 per cent of Logbook entries – not submitting one or more of the key tasks in the Logbook correctly, resulting in a fail for this section.

"The Logbook, which is completed over time and submitted in advance, is just as important as the three exam sections – News Interview, News Report and Media Law & Practice – and requires the same attention to detail. Candidates who, through errors or omissions, failed the Logbook can resubmit and have their work reassessed in November.

"Results in the other sections were, for the most part, in line with those of previous sittings, however, achievement in the News Report section was lower than usual."

Special congratulations go to the four prize winners: Joanna Morris (*The Northern Echo*) for Logbook; Rob Lawson (*Telegraph & Argus, Bradford*) for News Interview; Sarah Robinson (*Weston, Worle & Somerset Mercury*) for News Report; and Imogen Blake (*Ham & High*) for Media Law & Practice.

MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 61 candidates; 47 passed – 77 per cent

This was another good set of results.

As usual, contempt and defamation were tested in questions 1 and 2 and the majority of candidates showed a good understanding of the problems thrown up by the scenarios and how to overcome them.

Who owns the copyright of photographs on social media sites seemed to cause the most problems for candidates and many were also unclear about the ethics of recording calls.

It was good to see that most candidates did much better in question 3 this time. A number managed to pull up their overall mark with a very good answer here, which shows it is worth putting in the effort.

Those who gained the highest marks overall showed all-round knowledge and application across the three questions.

However, it is still obvious that a number of candidates did not give themselves enough time, and the resulting answers just skimmed the surface. Candidates need to do more than just identify the clauses of the Editors' Code of Practice that are being tested.

Candidates must keep themselves up-to-date with changes in the law. There were cases of people not being aware of the Defamation Act 2013.

The Independent Press Standards Organisation is now fully in operation and has made numerous adjudications, which are likely to be the basis for most, if not all, of the ethics parts to the exam. However, some of the old Press Complaints Commission's landmark rulings will still come into play and candidates will need knowledge of both.

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 method.

Examiners recommend that future candidates return to the latest edition of McNae's *Essential Law for Journalists* to brush up on defamation and contempt dangers and defences and court reporting restrictions. Regular visits to the IPSO and PCC adjudications and the Editors' Code Book, along with the Judicial Studies Board's Reporting Restrictions in the Criminal Courts, would also be helpful.

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 – 70 candidates; 45 passed – 64 per cent

Careless mistakes proved the undoing of many candidates in the July News Report exam. There were too many incorrect names, such as Jones for James, ages and dates and even the misspelling of Marquess which had been given in the brief.

The markers noted a tendency for direct quotes which got the gist of what was said but were not verbatim, a lazy practice suggesting that shorthand is an issue. The proportion of candidates who could produce full verbatim quotes was well below the usual level seen.

News sense was also questionable in many cases. The story had a good "human" angle in Paul North, vice-chairman of Morven Family History Society, whose personal mission had been to find an heir to the £8.5 million property. However, his search trail and success were rarely given much prominence. About half the candidates overlooked that Peter James, son of the 93-year-old American heir, was currently in the village dealing with the final arrangements for his father. The number of candidates who reported that the 93-year-old was in the UK concerned the examiners.

Examiners were also disappointed at the lack of immediacy in some of the stories. The family's claim to the estate had been accepted by the treasury *yesterday* and the press briefing was *today*.

In Part B, the obvious people to talk to for further information were Paul North and Peter James. There was a tendency for candidates to go for councillors, MPs and the visitor centre, without making any attempt to talk to the key players involved. Equally troubling, as mentioned previously, was the number of candidates who had decided that 93-year-old Norman James was in the UK and therefore wanted him pictured at the Buckwells estate, when it was his son, Peter James, who was present.

The follow-up ideas were often bland or unrealistic.

Examiners felt the general standard of submissions this time was lower than usual. Candidates are advised to work on their shorthand so that they can listen to what is being said and take selective notes, rather than struggle to keep up and possibly make mistakes.

Congratulations to those who were successful in the News Report this time.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 63 candidates; 49 passed – 78 per cent

This was a straightforward story about a young rugby club star, Robert MacIntosh, who was driving back to his parents' home with his girlfriend, Joanna Rigby, when he was run off the road by a "maniac" driver.

Their car left the road, ploughed through a fence and went down a 25-foot embankment where it ended up on its roof, trapping the couple. A witness and Joanna told how a BMW – stolen two hours before – drew alongside Robert’s distinctive yellow Audi at speed and then appeared to veer towards it, causing him to lose control of the car. He suffered spinal injuries and it was not known if he will walk again.

There was drama – the actual incident when the BMW driver tried to get Robert to “race”, veering into his car and then speeding off as the Audi plunged down the embankment.

There were good quotes from the witness who found a scene of “devastation” and from Robert’s parents who appealed for help to find the “maniac” driver.”

Many candidates got the point of the story – the promising player whose career is in doubt after suffering spinal injuries after he was run off the road. But some simply treated it as a crash, implying that Robert just drove off the road, not mentioning the BMW until much later in the story. This resulted in some weak intros which lost valuable marks. Others did not mention he was with his girlfriend until three quarters of the way through the copy.

Most candidates had a good chronology of events. However, there was some poor sentence construction in places. There were also some silly errors, such as missing numbers from the incident room telephone number, but overall most copy appeared reasonably clean.

There were some “howlers” that candidates did not pick up on, suggesting that more time needs to be dedicated to checking the copy before the end of the exam:

Breaking for braking
Crimpled for crumpled
Pug instead of plug earring.

Overall, candidates performed well in the News Interview this time.

Candidates are reminded that they are representing their newspaper/news organisation when they attend these exams and should therefore dress appropriately.

LOGBOOK – 49 candidates; 42 passed – 86 per cent

The logbook submissions made in July were generally of a high standard and showed that candidates had carefully considered their submissions and how they reflected the progress of their careers so far.

There were no major issues concerning the key tasks and where any criteria had not been understood we are happy to report that candidates had either requested confirmation from their editor/trainer or from the NCTJ.

However, it is bitterly disappointing that we have seen a significant rise in the number of candidates who have failed to upload either the final cutting, or more importantly the original copy for some of the individual key tasks.

Unfortunately, where examiners did not have access to the original copy, and where there was no explanation provided on the coversheet, the work could not be marked. This resulted in several failed logbooks as one or more of the key tasks had not been submitted properly and in accordance with the guidelines provided.

As previously said in the last two NQJ examiners' reports, candidates are strongly reminded that they must check and check again to make sure that they have uploaded all the correct elements, i.e. original and final copy, for all the key tasks to avoid making these careless errors which have a great impact on the outcome of their logbook submission.

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

(Pre March 2013 figures are for the National Certificate Examination)

	NOV 2012	MAR 2013	JUL 2013	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015
TOTAL ENTRY	<i>NCE</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	106	110	102	88	90	69	71	90	72
No of passes	56	59	50	54	60	50	48	65	44
No of failures	50	51	52	34	30	19	23	25	28
% passed	53	54	49	62	67	72	68	72	61

FIRST-TIMERS									
No of candidates	54	66	51	49	55	48	52	65	49
No of passes	28	33	32	32	38	35	33	49	28
No of failures	26	33	19	17	17	13	19	16	21
% passed	52	50	63	65	69	73	64	75	57

RE-SITS									
No of candidates	52	44	51	39	35	21	19	25	23
No of passes	28	26	18	22	22	15	15	16	16
No of failures	24	18	33	17	13	6	4	9	7
% passed	54	59	35	56	63	71	79	64	70

National Qualification in Journalism

Analysis of figures for each exam section (first-timers and re-sits)

(Pre March 2013 figures are for the old style National Certificate Examination)

	NOV 2012	MAR 2013	JUL 2013	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015
NEWS INTERVIEW									
No of candidates	89	99	89	71	75	61	65	78	63
No of passes	52	53	58	54	57	49	53	63	49
No of failures	37	46	31	17	18	12	12	15	14
% passed	58	54	65	76	76	80	82	81	78

NEWS REPORT									
No of candidates	98	103	96	79	83	67	69	88	70
No of passes	55	49	57	52	57	50	47	66	45
No of failures	43	54	39	27	26	17	22	22	25
% passed	56	48	59	66	69	75	68	75	64

MEDIA LAW & PRACTICE									
No of candidates	91	97	86	86	83	54	61	81	61
No of passes	55	55	37	59	71	42	47	67	47
No of failures	36	42	49	27	12	12	14	14	14
% passed	60	57	43	69	86	78	77	83	77

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