

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

July 2016

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In March, a total of 76 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at seven centres across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 58 candidates – a pass rate of 76 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

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

Jessica Bell

News Shopper

Jessica provided excellent answers, including full marks for question 2, in which she displayed not only good knowledge but also how to apply it to the scenarios thrown up by the questions. Added to which, there were suitable case studies that helped to cement the knowledge. The questions were answered in a logical way and the writing was crisp. Congratulations.

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

Hannah Mirsky

Cambridge News

Hannah's story was an excellent résumé of the speech and brief, written in a lively and easy-to-read style which engaged the reader from the outset. Her shorthand was impeccable, allowing her to use the best quotes in full. Her part B was the best seen by the markers since this section was introduced and Hannah was particularly impressive in the way she tackled the follow-up ideas, covering a wide range of ideas which comprehensively took the story forward with reader interaction.

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

Rebecca Choules

Hemel Hempstead Gazette

Rebecca showed she has a good nose for hard news. She captured the drama of the story, but did not forsake the details. Her phrasing was excellent.

She captured the reader's attention immediately with a strong intro and backed it up with a compelling read from start to finish. Congratulations.

NEWSQUEST AWARD (E-LOGBOOK – £250)

Michael Race

Oxford Mail

A superb logbook and one worthy of being our award winner.

Across a wide variety of key tasks Michael demonstrated a crisp and clear style. This resulted in an engaging read and showed an attention to detail which was extremely pleasing.

The high marks for this logbook were richly deserved and much of the work which it contains would prove of great benefit as an example to those planning a similar submission in the near future.

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

| | | |
|------------------|-------------|--|
| Naomi | Agius | <i>Bracknell News</i> |
| Polly | Albany-Ward | <i>Croydon Advertiser</i> |
| Samuel | Balls | <i>Essex Chronicle</i> |
| Thomas | Barnes | <i>Waltham Forest Guardian</i> |
| Federica | Bedendo | <i>Times & Star</i> |
| Guy | Bell | <i>Brentwood Gazette</i> |
| Jessica | Bell | <i>News Shopper</i> |
| Emma Kate | Billingham | <i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i> |
| Ralph | Blackburn | <i>Ilford Recorder</i> |
| Benjamin | Blosse | <i>Hull Daily Mail</i> |
| John | Blow | <i>Wakefield Express</i> |
| Jonny | Bonell | <i>North Devon Journal</i> |
| Richard | Brown | <i>Essex Chronicle</i> |
| Rachael | Burford | <i>Surrey Comet</i> |
| Iain | Burns | <i>Newham Recorder</i> |
| Michael | Carr | <i>Southern Daily Echo</i> |
| Rebecca | Choules | <i>Hemel Hempstead Gazette</i> |
| Michael | Cox | <i>Yellow Advertiser</i> |
| Isaac Anthony | Crowson | <i>Derby Evening Telegraph</i> |
| Arandeep Singh | Dhillon | <i>Warrington Guardian</i> |
| Matthew | Discombe | <i>The Gloucester Citizen</i> |
| Alexander | Drury | <i>Bracknell News</i> |
| Dayna Louise | Farrington | <i>Kidderminster Shuttle</i> |
| David | Gazet | <i>Kent Messenger</i> |
| Jordan Stuart | Harris | <i>Express & Star</i> |
| Daniel | Heald | <i>Border Counties Advertiser</i> |
| Michael | Holmes | <i>Blackpool Gazette</i> |
| Amani | Hughes | <i>Surrey Advertiser</i> |
| Lucy | Kenderdine | <i>Oldham Evening Chronicle</i> |
| Joel | Lamy | <i>Peterborough Evening Telegraph</i> |
| Callum | Lawton | <i>Midweek Herald</i> |
| Stefan | Mackley | <i>Gazette & Herald</i> |
| Felicity | MacNamara | <i>Halifax Evening Courier</i> |
| Bodhi | Maia | <i>Central Somerset Gazette</i> |
| Thomas | Malina | <i>Diss Express</i> |
| William | Mata | <i>Harlow Star</i> |
| Libby | McBride | <i>Brentwood Gazette</i> |
| Samuel | Meadows | <i>Hertfordshire Mercury</i> |
| Hannah | Mirsky | <i>Cambridge News</i> |
| Simon | Mulligan | <i>St Helens Star</i> |
| Ajay | Nair | <i>Ilford Recorder</i> |
| Jason | Noble | <i>Ipswich Star & East Anglian Daily Times</i> |
| Alistair Stewart | Paterson | <i>Bridlington Free Press</i> |
| Sam | Petherick | <i>Bath Chronicle</i> |
| Jack | Pitts | <i>South Wales Evening Post</i> |
| Clarissa | Place | <i>Sidmouth Herald</i> |

| | | |
|------------------|----------|--|
| Michael | Race | <i>Oxford Mail</i> |
| Iram | Ramzan | <i>Oldham Evening Chronicle</i> |
| James | Robinson | <i>Andover Advertiser</i> |
| Daniel Jonathan | Sharp | <i>Stourbridge News</i> |
| David | Spereall | <i>Hull Daily Mail</i> |
| Matthew | Stott | <i>Ipswich Star & East Anglian Daily Times</i> |
| Joshua | Thomas | <i>Cambridge News</i> |
| Liam | Waite | <i>Times & Star</i> |
| Stephanie Danika | Wareham | <i>Bucks Free Press</i> |
| Bethany | Whymark | <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> |
| Andrew | Wilkins | <i>Slough Observer</i> |
| Daniel | Wilkins | <i>Exmouth Journal</i> |
| Tanya | Yilmaz | <i>Wiltshire Times</i> |

CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

Candidates sitting the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) exams in July set a new record pass rate.

With 78 per cent of entrants achieving the award, it meant that not only were more than three-quarters of entrants successful for the first time but also that the previous highest pass rate of 74 per cent, set in the March sitting of the exams, was topped.

Chief examiner Steve Nelson said: "I am full of admiration for today's trainee journalists, who are not only multi-skilled and operating on various platforms but also required to show thorough knowledge in ever-expanding areas of media law and ethics."

"The NQJ exams can only be taken after a minimum training period of 18 months, and during that time the trainees will have tackled a multitude of stories and honed their skills.

"The attainment of the industry's professional qualification remains a key moment in the careers of these journalists."

A total of 76 candidates took the exams – the highest entry for more than a year – and 59 were successful across the four elements of interview, news report, media law & practice and e-logbook.

Special congratulations go to the four prizewinners, who each receive £250. They were: Jessica Bell (*News Shopper*) for media law & practice; Hannah Mirsky (*Cambridge News*) for news report; Rebecca Choules (*Hemel Hempstead Gazette*) for news interview; Michael Race (*Oxford Mail*) for e-logbook.

MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 65 candidates; 59 passed – 91 per cent

This was a gratifying set of results, with a high pass rate, which is what would be hoped for in an examination that tests what should be in the minds of all reporters every time they pursue and write a story.

The main thrust of the law side of the paper required candidates to show how qualified privilege and the Contempt of Court Act 1981 works, plus elements of court reporting.

Ethics were tested in both the law questions as well as the all-ethics question three. Most candidates were aware of the changes to the *Editors' Code of Practice*, although candidates were not penalised for getting the wrong clause numbers. This leniency will not be available for the November exam as the amended code will have been in operation for almost a year.

This ethics question tested knowledge of Clause 9, reporting crime, and to a lesser degree, Clause 2, privacy, along with whether the public interest exception would come into play. The overall standard of these answers was disappointing, with the majority of candidates failing to reach the pass mark for this question.

Whether this was due to a lack of knowledge or time is not possible to tell but there was evidence that some of the answers were rushed. This question needs time in order to be able to give a reasoned answer.

As in previous exams, candidates with a good writing style and a logical approach tended to do better. The need for concise writing is as important in this exam as it is in the other two: a high word count does not necessarily equate to a high level of knowledge. A bullet-point approach

when answering these questions is recommended but candidates will not be penalised if they do not adopt this.

Examiners recommend that future candidates return to the latest edition of *Essential Law for Journalists* to brush up on defamation and contempt dangers and defences and court reporting restrictions, plus case studies. Regular visits to the IPSO adjudications and the *Editors' Code of Practice*, along with the Judicial Studies Board's Reporting Restrictions in the Criminal Courts, would also be helpful. Those candidates who do not attend an NQJ refresher are put at a great disadvantage.

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 – 71 candidates; 56 passed – 79 per cent

Overall, the examiners noted a higher standard in papers submitted for the July exam. The topic was a giant sinkhole which appeared during demolition of Victorian cottages, revealing an almost completed Roman bath house beneath the surface. Candidates were quick to spot the key news angle and most of the associated points, including good quotes and relevant background information.

There was a tendency to make assumptions with this story; such as who sent the cameras down and when, that a Krakow style museum was a definite proposition and that the entire *Time Team* production would descend on Dunford, when the speaker clearly said it was “experts” from the programme.

Silly mistakes were noted in some papers including the day the sinkhole occurred, the spelling of the speaker's name and careless typos which changed the meaning and sense of aspects of the story.

Shorthand, on the whole, appeared to be better with good use of full quotes. Where shorthand was not up to scratch there was an annoying habit of merging bits of different quotes and presenting them as a verbatim quote. This would irritate a person being quoted and candidates must ensure their shorthand is up to the required speed to take down full quotes accurately.

Three candidates forgot to do part B which cost them vital marks. Generally, part B was of a high standard. Candidates should remember that they are asked to put forward suggestions of what they would do in this section and should take ownership of their ideas. Be positive and avoid the vague “I could....”, or “you could....”. The second section asks for illustrative ideas and candidates need to provide suggestions for a picture, video AND a graphic. When suggesting a campaign for the fourth element there must be a clear reason for the campaign, with an end result in mind, and it must be realistic.

Congratulations to all who passed this section. Your stories and follow-up suggestions were a pleasure to read.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 71 candidates; 60 passed – 85 per cent

Most candidates grasped the story – dog carcasses found in an old lock-up, the animals killed by possibly a dog hater or poisoner or by someone carrying out grotesque experiments. Many captured the horror of the inside of the lock-up with the swarms of flies, the terrible smell, the piles of decomposing bodies and bloody knives.

It was a story crammed with great detail and equally good quotes. Yet some candidates decided to start their intro with “Police...”. A poor choice when there was so much drama.

Others launched straight into the gruesome story and immediately caught the reader's attention. There was some confusion as to who raised the alarm. It was the dog walker, but some candidates noted it as the PCSO.

Some candidates jumped around too much and did not follow the story through, leaving the reader to make their own assumptions.

There were also issues with sentence construction, with elements missing.

Accuracy was also an issue for some candidates, from getting the van number plate wrong, to incorrect addresses. There were sloppy mistakes which cost candidates valuable marks and some strange wording:

“found a gruesome discovery”

“dog carcasses, none were alive”

Overall, it was pleasing to see candidates managed to piece together the story - police hunting someone who is dognapping pets and killing them, and the warning to owners to make sure their animals are safe. Congratulations to all who passed.

E-LOGBOOK – 61 candidates; 58 passed – 95 per cent

Logbook submissions were of a good quality overall and some impressive examples show candidates continue to produce excellent work when under pressure.

One area in which the examiners underline our advice to those submitting a logbook is to make sure that all criteria have been fulfilled, that all documents have been uploaded successfully and that the correct documents have been added to both parts of the key task. Candidates are reminded that where they are asked to include additional documentation via PDF or other format, or where they are asked to upload either a cutting or original copy, then they must double-check to make sure the correct documents have been uploaded.

If any element of the logbook is unclear, the examiners advise all those undertaking the logbook to seek help from their editor or trainer in the first instance, or contact the NCTJ and we will be happy to give advice.

National Qualification in Journalism – comparative figures

| | JUL 2013 | NOV 2013 | MAR 2014 | JUL 2014 | NOV 2014 | MAR 2015 | JUL 2015 | NOV 2015 | MAR 2016 | JUL 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 | 102 | 88 | 90 | 69 | 71 | 90 | 72 | 71 | 69 | 76 |
| No of passes | 50 | 54 | 60 | 50 | 48 | 65 | 44 | 43 | 51 | 59 |
| No of failures | 52 | 34 | 30 | 19 | 23 | 25 | 28 | 28 | 18 | 17 |
| % passed | 49 | 62 | 67 | 72 | 68 | 72 | 61 | 61 | 74 | 78 |

| FIRST-TIMERS | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| No of candidates | 51 | 49 | 55 | 48 | 52 | 65 | 49 | 51 | 50 | 57 |
| No of passes | 32 | 32 | 38 | 35 | 33 | 49 | 28 | 33 | 36 | 45 |
| No of failures | 19 | 17 | 17 | 13 | 19 | 16 | 21 | 18 | 14 | 12 |
| % passed | 63 | 65 | 69 | 73 | 64 | 75 | 57 | 65 | 72 | 79 |

| RE-SITS | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| No of candidates | 51 | 39 | 35 | 21 | 19 | 25 | 23 | 20 | 19 | 19 |
| No of passes | 18 | 22 | 22 | 15 | 15 | 16 | 16 | 10 | 15 | 14 |
| No of failures | 33 | 17 | 13 | 6 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 10 | 4 | 5 |
| % passed | 35 | 56 | 63 | 71 | 79 | 64 | 70 | 50 | 79 | 74 |

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

| | JUL 2013 | NOV 2013 | MAR 2014 | JUL 2014 | NOV 2014 | MAR 2015 | JUL 2015 | NOV 2015 | MAR 2016 | JUL 2016 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| NEWS INTERVIEW | | | | | | | | | | |
| No of candidates | 89 | 71 | 75 | 61 | 65 | 78 | 63 | 59 | 61 | 71 |
| No of passes | 58 | 54 | 57 | 49 | 53 | 63 | 49 | 43 | 47 | 60 |
| No of failures | 31 | 17 | 18 | 12 | 12 | 15 | 14 | 16 | 14 | 11 |
| % passed | 65 | 76 | 76 | 80 | 82 | 81 | 78 | 73 | 77 | 85 |

| NEWS REPORT | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| No of candidates | 96 | 79 | 83 | 67 | 69 | 88 | 70 | 68 | 66 | 71 |
| No of passes | 57 | 52 | 57 | 50 | 47 | 66 | 45 | 44 | 52 | 56 |
| No of failures | 39 | 27 | 26 | 17 | 22 | 22 | 25 | 24 | 14 | 15 |
| % passed | 59 | 66 | 69 | 75 | 68 | 75 | 64 | 65 | 79 | 79 |

| MEDIA LAW & PRACTICE | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| No of candidates | 86 | 86 | 83 | 54 | 61 | 81 | 61 | 60 | 59 | 65 |
| No of passes | 37 | 59 | 71 | 42 | 47 | 67 | 47 | 45 | 53 | 59 |
| No of failures | 49 | 27 | 12 | 12 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 15 | 6 | 6 |
| % passed | 43 | 69 | 86 | 78 | 77 | 83 | 77 | 75 | 90 | 91 |

| LOGBOOK | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| No of candidates | 51 | 51 | 55 | 48 | 54 | 65 | 49 | 56 | 55 | 61 |
| No of passes | 49 | 51 | 54 | 46 | 54 | 65 | 42 | 53 | 50 | 58 |
| No of failures | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| % passed | 96 | 100 | 98 | 96 | 100 | 100 | 86 | 95 | 91 | 95 |