

# **NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM**

## **Examiners' Report**

**July 2017**

# NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

7 July 2017

In July, a total of 53 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at six centres across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 35 candidates – a pass rate of 66 per cent.

## AWARD WINNERS

### **THE MEDIA LAW AWARD (MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – £250)**

Laura Drysdale

*Wakefield Express*

97%. Brilliant! That's the only word to use to describe this paper. Two perfect answers, including the ethics question, shows what an exceptional candidate Laura is. Apart from the knowledge shown and application to the scenarios, this paper was logically put together with an easy-to-read style. Congratulations!

### **ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)**

Matthew Clemenson

*Ilford Recorder*

Matthew showed himself to be a confident, competent reporter producing clean copy crammed with detail and accurate quotes. His story was a joy to read. In part B he missed scoring a perfect 20 by just one mark.

Congratulations.

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

Charlotte Bowe

*The Northern Echo*

Charlotte's interview had a good pace. Her intro grabbed the reader immediately followed by a strong second and third par that set the scene well. This was followed by a chronology that led the reader through, backed-up by first-rate quotes.

According to the marker, it was a piece of copy to make a news desk very happy!

### **NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)**

George Torr

*Sheffield Star*

An excellent logbook and one which proved to be clearly above the rest in terms of quality and depth of submissions. Maximum marks were recorded across a wide range of key tasks, but what proved just as satisfying was the consistency across all of the submissions, and the fact that marking criteria were reached.

A superb example to anyone compiling their logbook from a candidate with a firm grasp of all the essentials.

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

Nicola	Birch	<i>Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph</i>
Samantha	Booth	<i>Croydon Advertiser</i>
Charlotte	Bowe	<i>The Northern Echo</i>
Jack	Brooke-Battersby	<i>Westmorland Gazette</i>
Jennifer Lynn	Brown	<i>The Cumberland News</i>
Tom	Burnett	<i>The Sentinel</i>
Matthew	Clemenson	<i>Ilford Recorder</i>
Stephen	D'Albiac	<i>The Western Gazette</i>
Laura	Drysdale	<i>Wakefield Express</i>
Jack	Duggan	<i>Rugby Advertiser</i>
Sian	Elvin	<i>Kent &amp; Sussex Courier</i>
Sophie	Grubb	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
David	Hannant	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Daniel	Hayes	<i>Derbyshire Times</i>
John	Herring	<i>Newbury Weekly News</i>
Katherine	Hopps	<i>Barking &amp; Dagenham Post</i>
Catherine	Johnson	<i>Braintree &amp; Witham Times</i>
Lara	Keay	<i>Wanstead &amp; Woodford Guardian</i>
Callum	Keown	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Jessica	Labhart	<i>Express &amp; Star</i>
Matthew	Lennon	<i>Watford Observer</i>
Thomas	Mackintosh	<i>Croydon Advertiser</i>
Joe	Middleton	<i>Kent &amp; Sussex Courier</i>
Steven	Prince	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Jasmine	Rapson	<i>Bucks Free Press</i>
Nicholas	Reid	<i>Tamworth Herald</i>
William	Rimell	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>
Steven	Salter	<i>Somerset County Gazette</i>
James	Silcocks	<i>Louth Leader</i>
Anne	Suslak	<i>Herts Advertiser</i>
David	Taylor	<i>The Bolton News</i>
George	Torr	<i>Sheffield Star</i>
Rhea	Turner	<i>Burton Mail</i>
Thomas	Van Klaveren	<i>Croydon Advertiser</i>
Abigail	Weaving	<i>Saffron Walden Reporter</i>

## SUMMARY

Two-thirds of trainees in the July sitting of the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) exams achieved the qualification.

A total of 35 of the 53 candidates were successful in all four parts – media law and practice, news report, news interview and e-logbook – achieving ‘senior journalist’ status. The pass rate of 66 per cent was six per cent lower than the previous sitting in March.

Notably, there was a near-perfect pass rate of 98 per cent in the media law and practice exam, which led the moderator to eulogise: “An excellent set of results, with some extremely high marks and an exceptional winner. The knowledge and application displayed by most candidates was very encouraging and should inspire confidence with editors.”

The July NQJ also witnessed a return to a 100 per cent pass rate for e-logbook, the first since March 2015. The moderator said: “Markers enjoyed a strong range of submissions and there were no major issues with logbooks in this round.”

News report and news interview had lower pass rates with 67 per cent and 70 per cent of candidates passing these respective sections. Shorthand was highlighted by the moderators as the most likely problem.

An outstanding performance by Laura Drysdale, of the *Wakefield Express*, saw her win the £250 media law prize. Laura’s mark of 97 per cent represents a record total in this exam.

Special congratulations also go to the other three prize winners who each receive £250: Matthew Clemenson (*Ilford Recorder*) for news report (79 per cent); Charlotte Bowe (*The Northern Echo*) for news interview (65 per cent); and George Torr (*Sheffield Star*) for e-logbook (78 per cent).

## **MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE** – 48 candidates; 47 passed – 98 per cent

An excellent set of results, with some extremely high marks and an exceptional winner. The knowledge and application displayed by most candidates was very encouraging and should inspire confidence with editors.

Question 1 tested defamation and the qualified privilege defence available when reporting from a public meeting, along with confidentiality. Most candidates coped well with this question.

Question 2 tested knowledge of what constituted contempt when a case was active and the defence available under the Attorney General’s assurance when quoting from a police appeal. It also tested knowledge of the circumstances required for a court to impose a Section 46 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 for witnesses. While most candidates realised this is what the question was seeking, a number incorrectly referred to Section 11 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981.

Both questions had an ethics element, which most answered correctly, although some were sketchy on Clause 16, payments to a family member for a story that glamourises crime.

While there were many well-argued answers for Question 3, with a majority either scoring a pass or borderline mark, there was a disappointing number who failed this section. This is probably down to a timing issue rather than a lack of understanding. The question posed a dilemma that faces reporters on a regular basis, how do you respond when a bereaved partner does not want anything published despite there being a public outpouring of grief? The question invites the candidate to debate what they would be willing to publish and what constitutes handling such a case with sympathy and discretion.

Apart from highlighting Clause 4 (grief and sensitivity), there was no clear right and wrong answer in some of this. Arguments should have revolved round whether publication of a news story about a well-known member of the community would be insensitive or intruding into grief or shock. While publication needs to be handled sensitively, this does not mean having to obtain the family's consent to publish an article about a tragedy. Would IPSO rule that a single, polite Facebook message was intrusion or harassment; and would publishing the widow's message written on an open card in a public place be a failure to handle publication sensitively? No, although an argument could have been put forward to agree to her personal request over the message.

Publishing nothing was not an option as there was public interest in reporting on a fatal accident, especially in view of the circumstances of this one, but candidates who did well showed a sensitive and sympathetic approach, explaining how they would do that and not just repeating what the code says. Application is as important as knowledge.

Once again, candidates with a good writing style and a logical approach, allied to knowledge, tended to do better. 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 Book*, 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** – 51 candidates; 34 passed – 67 per cent

The July news report paper was a topical story about a garage discontinuing its VW franchise as a result of the emissions scandal. Instead the garage was returning to its roots of servicing, repairs and MOTs for all makes of vehicle plus setting up a sales and restoration business in secondhand VW campervans which are no longer made, but in high demand.

Candidates seemed to quickly get the gist of the story but tended to overlook the family detail which readers would want. Shorthand proved a problem and was almost certainly to blame for some of the major mistakes made that would have needed a correction.

One candidate managed to write his entire story without once mentioning campervans.

Poor spelling always upsets the markers and this time the biggest howler was from the 10 per cent of candidates who said the garage was "going back to its routes".

It seems that today's young journalists are used to writing short stories on one aspect and they found difficulty getting sufficient detail in their exam papers to cover all the angles. Tighter writing and more comprehensive stories are needed, getting away from the assumption that readers will know the rest of the story.

Direct quotes were far from verbatim in all but the best stories, again probably due to weak shorthand. There were extracts cut too short to be meaningful or cobbled with other extracts and presented as a direct quote, sections omitted and transcription errors. We cannot stress too highly how important it is for journalists to get their shorthand up to a workable reliable speed.

In part B there were some sound ideas but sometimes candidates overlooked the obvious. Only one candidate suggested finding out what would happen to the 20 VW sales staff and service engineers when the company changed direction.

Suggestions of people to speak to in 15 minutes to enhance/balance the story were generally weak. Candidates should look for someone with something strong to contribute and whose voice will be important to the story.

### **NEWS INTERVIEW** – 50 candidates; 35 passed – 70 per cent

This was a straightforward story about a raid at a stately home, in which three men tied the housekeeper's husband to a chair and shut her and the family dog in a pantry before fleeing with candlesticks which were copies of expensive originals.

There was plenty of detail about the raid, from the housekeeper's screams heard by her husband, to his attempt to fight back and calling the raiders scum.

There were also good quotes, from the wife who thought her husband was dead and wished the dog had bitten one of the raiders harder, to the gamekeeper who told how Mr Adamson looked in a bad way. There was a quote from the police officer who described the raiders as stupid for a catalogue of mistakes: wearing orange trainers on both sightings, stealing the candlesticks which were copies, and to climbing over the wall when they had ladders on their van.

Despite the amount of good detail, many candidates went for the pedestrian intro starting: "Police are hunting....".

Some candidates went on the line of what the raiders stole and the 'hero' dog.

If someone is left for dead, it is a much better choice for an intro.

Others got lost with the story and confused the reader after failing to understand the whole scenario. Several made lots of assumptions and added facts without any explanation or context. Many candidates called the injured man the housekeeper which added to the confusion. Others had the wife tied up.

It was interesting to note that some candidates did not use up their allotted time; one only spent six minutes interviewing and another only nine minutes.

Looking at scripts it was obvious that some candidates had issues with their shorthand – the giveaway two-word quotes were in evidence.

Some also went over the word count, losing valuable marks.

Overall some candidates did well, but the number of borderlines and fails for this exam was disappointing.

### **LOGBOOK** – 41 candidates; 41 passed – 100 per cent

Markers enjoyed a strong range of submissions and there were no major issues with logbooks in this round.

Some candidates did still struggle with the problem of uploading the correct information when it comes to original copy and cuttings. Those submitting are reminded that any incorrectly uploaded documentation on key tasks will be marked as a zero. We would always recommend to double-check all copy which has been uploaded and also to seek a second opinion. Examiners advise all those undertaking the logbook to make sure that if they are unsure of anything, then in the first instance they should seek help from their editor or trainer, or contact the NCTJ and we will be happy to give advice ahead of marking.

## National Qualification in Journalism for Reporters - comparative figures

	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017
<b>TOTAL ENTRY</b>	<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	69	71	90	72	71	69	76	59	57	53
No of passes	50	48	65	44	43	51	59	40	41	35
No of failures	19	23	25	28	28	18	17	19	16	18
<b>% passed</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>66</b>

<b>FIRST-TIMERS</b>										
No of candidates	48	52	65	49	51	50	57	43	43	41
No of passes	35	33	49	28	33	36	45	27	33	32
No of failures	13	19	16	21	18	14	12	16	10	9
<b>% passed</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>78</b>

<b>RE-SITS</b>										
No of candidates	21	19	25	23	20	19	19	16	14	12
No of passes	15	15	16	16	10	15	14	13	8	3
No of failures	6	4	9	7	10	4	5	3	6	9
<b>% passed</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>25</b>

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

	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017
<b>NEWS INTERVIEW</b>										
No of candidates	61	65	78	63	59	61	71	52	54	50
No of passes	49	53	63	49	43	47	60	35	42	35
No of failures	12	12	15	14	16	14	11	17	12	15
<b>% passed</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>70</b>

<b>NEWS REPORT</b>										
No of candidates	67	69	88	70	68	66	71	56	54	51
No of passes	50	47	66	45	44	52	56	40	39	34
No of failures	17	22	22	25	24	14	15	16	16	17
<b>% passed</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>67</b>

<b>MEDIA LAW &amp; PRACTICE</b>										
No of candidates	54	61	81	61	60	59	65	49	50	48
No of passes	42	47	67	47	45	53	59	39	41	47
No of failures	12	14	14	14	15	6	6	10	12	1
<b>% passed</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>98</b>

<b>LOGBOOK</b>										
No of candidates	48	54	65	49	56	55	61	46	43	41
No of passes	46	54	65	42	53	50	58	45	42	41
No of failures	2	0	0	7	3	5	3	1	5	0
<b>% passed</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>