

# **NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM**

## **Examiners' Report**

**March 2017**

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In March, a total of 57 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at 7 centres across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 41 candidates – a pass rate of 72 per cent.

## AWARD WINNERS

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

Rosaleen Fenton

*Ilford Recorder*

An excellent, all round paper with no weaknesses. It was particularly good on the legal and ethical dangers of taking and publishing photographs from a crash scene and jigsaw dangers in reporting sex cases. A good analysis of the problems posed in question 3. Rosaleen's answers were logically worked out and easy to follow.

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

Geraldine Scott

*Eastern Daily Press*

Geraldine produced a confidently written report containing key facts and enough background to give readers a full understanding of the story and the implications for students of the sixth form college when it closed. The story was delivered in a crisp, easy-to-read style with logical progression. Her Part B follow-up plans were well thought out and detailed. Her paper was a pleasure to mark.

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

Robert Langley

*Retford Times*

Robert's story had a strong intro covering all the main points of the story which immediately gripped the reader. There was a good high quote from the victim's mother backed-up by other crucial quotes from the victims and the police officer.

His copy flowed well and he captured the drama of the attacks with some excellent writing.

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

Kieran Murray

*Bridlington Free Press*

A well compiled logbook and one which hit maximum marks across a wide range of key tasks.

Judges were particularly impressed by submissions for human interest, courts and councils, while almost every other aspect scored highly and showed real maturity. A great example to anyone compiling their logbook and a body of work which shows 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.

Ann-Marie	Abbasah	<i>Ilford Recorder</i>
Joel	Adams	<i>The Argus</i>
Jack	Averty	<i>Express &amp; Star</i>
Alexander	Ballinger	<i>Get West London</i>
Rochelle	Barrand	<i>Doncaster Free Press</i>
Stephanie	Brawn	<i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>
Eve	Buckland	<i>Swindon Advertiser</i>
Clare	Butler	<i>Express &amp; Star</i>
Loughlan	Campbell	<i>The News, Portsmouth</i>
Stewart	Carr	<i>Luton Herald &amp; Post</i>
Nick	Charity	<i>Mansfield Chad</i>
Richard	Craig	<i>Epsom Guardian</i>
Thomas	Dalby	<i>Harwich &amp; Manningtree Standard</i>
Sophie	Day	<i>Hunts Post</i>
Rosaleen	Fenton	<i>Ilford Recorder</i>
Freya	Findlay	<i>The Cumberland News</i>
Christopher	Flanagan	<i>Welwyn &amp; Hatfield Times</i>
Joshua	Fordham	<i>The Western Gazette</i>
James	Harrison	<i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>
Ben	Hendry	<i>Press &amp; Journal, Aberdeen</i>
Tom	Herbert	<i>Buckinghamshire Advertiser</i>
Joseph	Keith	<i>Yorkshire Evening Post</i>
Robert	Langley	<i>Retford Times</i>
David	Lee	<i>Windsor &amp; Eton Express</i>
Erin	Lyons	<i>The Chronicle Series</i>
David	Mackie	<i>The Press, York</i>
Tom	Matthews	<i>Croydon Advertiser</i>
Kieran	Murray	<i>Bridlington Free Press</i>
Amy	Nickalls	<i>Folkestone Herald</i>
Katherine	Palmer	<i>Braintree &amp; Witham Times</i>
James	Peck	<i>Retford Times</i>
Daniel	Prince	<i>Sunderland Echo</i>
David	Rivers	<i>Ealing Gazette</i>
Connie	Rusk	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Geraldine	Scott	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Caleb	Spencer	<i>Cambrian News</i>
Michael	Steward	<i>Saffron Walden Reporter</i>
Alexander	Thorp	<i>Grimsby Telegraph</i>
Huw	Wales	<i>Hertfordshire Mercury</i>
Philip	Winter	<i>Goole Times</i>
James	Woolven	<i>Isle of Wight County Press</i>

## CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

A small increase in the pass rate saw 72 per cent of candidates achieve the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) in the March sitting of the exams.

A total of 41 of the 57 candidates were successful in all four parts – News Interview, News Report, Media Law and Practice, and Logbook – and thereby achieved senior status.

This compared with a pass rate of 68 per cent achieved in the previous sitting of the exams in November. It was the lowest entry since the NQJ was introduced four years ago to replace the National Certificate in Journalism (NCE), reflecting the shrinking newspaper industry.

In his report as chief examiner, Steve Nelson said: “The pass rate had dipped in the previous sitting, 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.”

“There was also a much-improved pass rate in the News Interview section and a slight increase in the News Report section.”

Special congratulations go to the four prizewinners, who each receive £250: Rosaleen Fenton (*Iford Recorder*) for Media Law and Practice; Geraldine Scott (*Eastern Daily Press*) for News Report; Robert Langley (*Retford Times*) for News Interview, and Kieran Murray (*Bridlington Free Press*) for Logbook.

## MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 50 candidates; 41 passed – 82 per cent

Timing is still an issue with some candidates, especially when it comes to the final question on ethics. This needs thought as well as knowledge and cannot be rushed, which appeared to be the case for some.

In these days of multimedia journalists, it's important that reporters know the legal and ethical dangers in taking and publishing photographs. This was thoroughly tested in Question 1 but many candidates showed poor knowledge of privacy problems, both legal and ethical, and how to overcome them. Copyright knowledge was better. While most candidates knew that Section 11 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 was the one courts used to prevent the name of a defendant being published, there was poor knowledge that it should be used only in the interests of the administration of justice. Few could cite case law which says the risk to safety must be “real and immediate, objective, backed by evidence, and not merely a person's subjective fears”.

Question 2 produced a better set of answers with good knowledge of the dangers of identifying a victim of rape and the practical solutions of what material should be removed from a court case and why. Most candidates knew that a report based on a press release from a local authority would be protected from defamation action by qualified privilege.

While few candidates failed the ethics question, there were not many outstanding answers. It is not enough just to list the various clauses involved; in this scenario they were accuracy, privacy, children and discrimination, along with public interest. Candidates must also explain why and what should or should not be reported. That said, there were some excellently argued answers.

It was disappointing that a few candidates were not aware of the changes to the *Editors' Code*.

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** 54 candidates; 39 passed – 72 per cent

The pass rate in the March news report section was higher than recent exams but candidates were still making avoidable mistakes.

The story centred on Bankshire county education authority's £45million 10-year regeneration project for old Victorian schools and colleges in East Milden. Ten schools had been completed and the 11<sup>th</sup> – East Milden Sixth Form College – was due to commence in a month's time. Falling numbers and a move away from sixth form colleges to academies and community technical colleges meant the £2.05m rebuild of East Milden Sixth Form College was no longer viable or desirable.

The news was broken by Alicia McFarlan, lead councillor for education in Bankshire, at a press briefing.

Many candidates made statistical errors in their stories, chiefly the cost of the sixth form college rebuild. They used only the county contribution of £1.6m and overlooked the Government contribution of £450,000 bringing the total cost to £2.05m. Similar errors were made with the total 10-year plan.

Shorthand was still poor and it is clear that trainees in today's newsrooms are not maintaining the 100wpm gained in their diploma exams, let alone improving it to the required ability to take short bursts at 120wpm. In addition, they are not listening to what the speaker is saying and putting the story in context.

Too many candidates are concentrating on the content of the speech when writing Part A and overlooking key aspects from the brief. Very few candidates picked up on the apprenticeship link with the town's docks, a major factor for the town.

In Part B candidates need to think through what they are suggesting. The second part asked for ideas to illustrate the story which was being published immediately. Pictures of the students leaving the college on the day it closed were not appropriate. For the third question very few picked up on the importance of talking to the docks' management about the implications for future apprentices. Many seem to think they have to have a campaign, whether it is relevant or not. More thought is needed in Part B to ensure the answers cover all the bases and are appropriate.

## **NEWS INTERVIEW** 54 candidates; 42 passed – 78 per cent

This was a story about the rape of a 14-year-old girl, snatched from an alleyway by an apologetic attacker twenty minutes after he attempted to sexually assault a woman in her 30s a short distance away.

The man actually spoke to both victims and told them he was sorry. He told the girl it had 'been a long time' and that he did not want to hurt her.

He had obviously been loitering in the area.

There was plenty of detail about the attacks – the woman fought him and scratched his face, drawing blood. The girl was held down by her wrists during the ordeal.

There were also plenty of quotes, including a dramatic one from the girl's mother pleading for the monster who had ruined her daughter's life to be caught.

There was good detail about the police operation; the area was cordoned off, and police were going through records of sexual attackers recently released from prison. They were also taking samples from under the woman's fingernails to test for DNA. There were strong quotes from the police officer and there was a full description of the attacker.

Despite the amount of good detail, many candidates went for the pedestrian intro starting: "Police are hunting...." Some used the word teenager in the intro – the girl was just 14 – always use the age.

Several candidates took chronology literally and started with the first attack – the rape was the most important attack and should have been the main focus. Some took a different approach and used the mother's plea. That was not penalised – but tell the story first. Further candidates seemed afraid to use the word 'rape', and one used 'alleged' throughout the copy.

Several candidates failed to include the police operation - i.e. looking into records of sex attackers leaving prison recently to link in with his words to the girl about it being 'a long time'.

However some pieced the story together well, immediately linking the two attacks within minutes and within a short distance.

It was pleasing to note that there were hardly any howlers, although spellings were an issue for some who turned Crausby into Crasby and Crosby. There were also a few issues with shorthand and accurate quotes, and some candidates went over the word count.

All these errors led to a loss of marks.

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

**LOGBOOK** – 43 candidates; 42 passed – 98 per cent

Markers were pleased to see a good range of submissions and there were few issues with the subject matter chosen by candidates across all of their key tasks.

The logbook continues to provide an excellent vehicle to determine just how well a candidate writes and their grasp of the knowledge needed to address the various subjects.

The problem of uploading the correct information when it comes to original copy and cuttings still persists for some and we would always recommend a double check on all copy which has been uploaded and also to seek a second opinion.

We would 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

	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 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	90	69	71	90	72	71	69	76	59	57
No of passes	60	50	48	65	44	43	51	59	40	41
No of failures	30	19	23	25	28	28	18	17	19	16
<b>% passed</b>	<b>67</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>FIRST-TIMERS</b>										
No of candidates	55	48	52	65	49	51	50	57	43	43
No of passes	38	35	33	49	28	33	36	45	27	33
No of failures	17	13	19	16	21	18	14	12	16	10
<b>% passed</b>	<b>69</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>RE-SITS</b>										
No of candidates	35	21	19	25	23	20	19	19	16	14
No of passes	22	15	15	16	16	10	15	14	13	8
No of failures	13	6	4	9	7	10	4	5	3	6
<b>% passed</b>	<b>63</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>

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

	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017
<b>NEWS INTERVIEW</b>										
No of candidates	75	61	65	78	63	59	61	71	52	54
No of passes	57	49	53	63	49	43	47	60	35	42
No of failures	18	12	12	15	14	16	14	11	17	12
<b>% passed</b>	<b>76</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>NEWS REPORT</b>										
No of candidates	83	67	69	88	70	68	66	71	56	54
No of passes	57	50	47	66	45	44	52	56	40	39
No of failures	26	17	22	22	25	24	14	15	16	15
<b>% passed</b>	<b>69</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>MEDIA LAW &amp; PRACTICE</b>										
No of candidates	83	54	61	81	61	60	59	65	49	50
No of passes	71	42	47	67	47	45	53	59	39	41
No of failures	12	12	14	14	14	15	6	6	10	9
<b>% passed</b>	<b>86</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>

	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017
<b>LOGBOOK</b>										
No of candidates	55	48	54	65	49	56	55	61	46	43
No of passes	54	46	54	65	42	53	50	58	45	42
No of failures	1	2	0	0	7	3	5	3	1	1
<b>% passed</b>	<b>98</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>