

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

March 2018

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

2 & 23 March 2018

In March, a total of 42 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at six centres across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 23 candidates – a pass rate of 55 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

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

Samuel Jackson

Leamington Spa Courier

An excellent, all-round paper showing good knowledge and application. The answers were logically worked out and easy to follow. Question 3 showed careful consideration of how to handle the issues and good strategy.

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

Samuel Jackson

Leamington Spa Courier

Samuel managed to capture all the key points from the speech and brief and present them into a well-written story with pace and accuracy. The quotes were well chosen, accurately transcribed and added value. In part B the follow-up ideas were thorough and imaginative, involving reader interaction and social media.

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

Jordan Reynolds

Shropshire Star

Jordan's intro set the scene, taking the reader straight into the drama from the second paragraph. There was good detail, well used quotes and the piece flowed well.

NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)

Katherine Clementine

Surrey Advertiser

Judging was difficult for this round as there were a number of very similar, excellent logbook submissions.

Katherine presented a consistent submission which scored high marks across a range of diverse key tasks. Judges were especially impressed with key tasks for press releases, social media, trainee's choice and major stories - all of which showed a firm grasp of the criteria required.

A strong logbook and a collection of work showing a candidate fully able to source and develop a story.

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

Hollie	Bone	<i>Harrogate Advertiser</i>
Kieran	Beattie	<i>Press & Journal</i>
Milo	Boyd	<i>Reading Chronicle</i>
Ricky	Charlesworth	<i>Yorkshire Post</i>
Katherine	Clementine	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Emma	Crichton	<i>Inverness Courier</i>
Michael	Drummond	<i>Worthing Herald</i>
Estel	Farell Roig	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Nicholas	Gullon	<i>The Northern Echo</i>
James	Hockaday	<i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>
Rebecca	Hudson	<i>Salisbury Journal Newspapers</i>
Samuel	Jackson	<i>Leamington Spa Courier</i>
Christopher	Jaffray	<i>Press & Journal</i>
Anna	Khoo	<i>Chichester Observer</i>
Nicholas	Marko	<i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>
Ryan	Merrifield	<i>Worcester News</i>
Richard	Mills	<i>Wiltshire Times</i>
Harriet	Orrell	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Jonathan	Rees	<i>The Mail</i>
Jordan	Reynolds	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Samantha	Spowart	<i>Hexham Courant</i>
Stephen	Topping	<i>Wilmslow Guardian</i>
Cheuk Ling Ann	Yip	<i>Get Surrey</i>

SUMMARY

Adverse weather conditions on the day of the scheduled National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) exams on 2 March meant that a small number of exam centres were unable to open. We were very pleased to be able to offer a special exam sitting for the NQJ on Friday 23 March for candidates affected by the centre closures. This gave all candidates enrolled for the March NQJ the opportunity to sit their exams and receive their results by the published results date of 10 April. Candidates unable to sit on the extra date will have the opportunity to sit in July.

Over the two sittings in March, a total of 55 per cent of trainees achieved the qualification. The NCTJ experienced a lower number of enrolments for the March sittings of the NQJ exams – a total of 42 candidates sat the March exams, compared with 63 candidates at the previous NQJ sitting in November.

Out of the 42 candidates who sat the exams, 23 were successful in all four parts – media law and practice, news report, news interview and e-logbook – achieving ‘senior journalist’ status.

There was an overall pass rate of 65 per cent in the media law and practice exams. The moderator said: “In general, the overall pass rate for this exam was lower than previous recent exams. Candidates with a logical approach, allied to knowledge, tended to do better in this paper.”

The March NQJ saw a return to a 100 per cent pass rate for e-logbook. The moderator said: “The March exams saw a number of good submissions from candidates which led to some strong competition for the overall logbook prize.”

The news interview exams had an overall pass rate of 64 per cent. The moderator said: “Those who passed had a readable writing style, caught the drama and included strong quotes.”

There was an overall pass rate of 55 per cent in the news report exams. The moderator confirmed that whilst some part B answers were excellent and well-thought out, poor shorthand and the ability to take accurate, selective notes from the news report were the most common problems experienced in part A.

An outstanding performance by Samuel Jackson, of the *Leamington Spa Courier*, saw him win the £250 media law prize. Samuel also won the £250 prize for news report.

Special congratulations also go to the other two prize winners who each receive £250: Jordan Elizabeth Reynolds (*Shropshire Star*) for news interview and Katherine Rose Clementine (*Surrey Advertiser*) for e-logbook.

MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 37 candidates; 24 passed – 65 per cent

As always, defamation, contempt, aspects of court reporting and ethical areas were tested. In paper one there was also confidentiality and in paper two confidentiality and copyright.

2 MARCH

While most candidates showed a good understanding of the defence of honest opinion, many failed to pick up the dangers of reporting potentially defamatory comments when covering evolving news stories and the ethical implications. Most candidates were good on contempt dangers.

Question 3 proved to be quite a test for some candidates, where only nine out of 24 reached the pass mark and 11 failed it completely. Marks ranged from a brilliant 18 to a disappointing two. The scenario of the dangers of using tweets when covering a major terrorist incident threw up numerous problems but none that should be beyond a candidate who keeps themselves up to

date with the news and IPSO rulings. Candidates needed to spot the clauses that came into play, 1, 2, 4 and 6, explain why and come up with a strategy for dealing with the problems without breaching the codes. Just stating which codes apply is not enough, much greater discussion is required.

It is possible the poor marks for question 3 are down to candidates not giving themselves enough time, a problem that is highlighted after nearly every NQJ law paper.

23 MARCH

Most candidates showed a good understanding of what constituted a defamatory statement and why, along the requirements of the honest opinion defence. Most candidates were strong on what would create contempt and why, and what would need to be removed to conform to reporting restrictions under Section 52a of the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 and the Sexual Offences (Amendment Act) 1992. Although one candidate referred to the Magistrates' Court Act restrictions which ceased to operate some years ago. Most spotted the confidentiality dangers of using a report leaked by an employee but only one person realised there was also a copyright danger.

Question 3 produced a better set of marks with most candidates picking up on the privacy and insensitivity dangers of using photographs from a crash scene that could identify a seriously injured person and lifting pictures from a social media site that showed the dead man when he was out celebrating. To score well, answers require more than just listing what the clauses say, they have to be applied to the scenarios explaining what the problems are and how to avoid breaching the code.

Again, it was evident some candidates did not give themselves enough time to answer the question.

In general, the overall pass rate for Media Law and Practice was lower than previous recent exams. Candidates with a logical approach, allied to knowledge, tended to do better. A bullet-point approach when answering 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. Both HoldtheFrontPage and Press Gazette cover the more important IPSO rulings and have regular law and ethics articles. 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 – 42 candidates; 23 passed – 55 per cent

2 MARCH

The quality of some papers submitted for the 2 March exam were disappointing. Markers were presented with a number of inaccurate stories and errors which would require immediate clarification or correction.

The story was about the discovery of a dangerous chemical, picric acid, which, if allowed to dry out and crystallise could cause a massive explosion that would decimate an industrial estate. The buildings around the former Fielder Waste Solutions site were cordoned off and neighbouring businesses evacuated.

Whether shorthand was to blame for the errors, or news-hungry trainees not listening properly to the speech, the outcome was readers being told an entire industrial estate had been evacuated, a school had been closed or local residents moved from their homes. None of this was true.

Problems also arose over the quantities of substances found.

NHS test pots with confidential patients' details were also in the building but this aspect was buried by many in their stories.

It is vital that trainees ensure their shorthand is up to speed for their work. In the exam they can help themselves by practising outlines from the brief during the 10-minute familiarisation time. They should also listen to what is being said while taking selective notes.

In part B, some of the candidates' ideas were based on errors – such as talking to residents who had been evacuated. Remember there are only 15 minutes to talk to two people to add to/balance the story – trying to chase up representatives of a firm which has disappeared without trace would not be practical. Some part B answers were excellent and well-thought out.

23 MARCH

There were some excellent papers in the 23 March exam.

The story detailed plans to lifeguard a popular sandy beach where day trippers had died the previous year after being caught in rip tides. Nine people had died in 10 years and the candidates' paper had run a campaign for beach lifeguards. In the speech, RNLI operations director Sharron Perriman announced that the beach would be lifeguarded from Good Friday and she gave full details, together with some background to the decision.

Shorthand was a big problem for many candidates who were unable to take down and transcribe accurate quotes. Markers noticed a tendency for candidates to get key phrases and cobble them together which would have got them into trouble with their sources.

In part B, there was a mixture of excellent ideas across a broad range in some cases and in others candidates had overlooked the practicality of their suggestions. Markers are looking for 7-8 *different* suggestions, not variations on a theme such as vox pop, questioning beach visitors and running an online poll – all on the same question. Taking water safety into schools was another good idea – but was the reporter qualified to teach it?

The key message from these exams is that shorthand must be up to speed and neat enough to be accurately transcribed back.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 42 candidates; 27 passed – 64 per cent

2 MARCH

This was a story with two incidents which were linked. Candidates were told of the second incident first – a three-mile police pursuit which ended when a Land Rover Discovery tried to evade a stinger device, crashed into a central reservation barrier and overturned, killing the passenger. Weapons and cash were found in the back of the vehicle. The driver ran off, possibly injured.

Candidates were also told of another incident in the town 20 minutes earlier, near a club run by ex-footballer Andrew Parkinson, who retired after breaking his leg. They needed to piece together that the raid was at Mr Parkinson's club where he now raises money for charity. He was in the club with his girlfriend, Jessica Napier, when three raiders armed with a shotgun and machetes, conned their way in by saying someone was being stabbed outside.

Candidates needed to combine the drama of the raid with the subsequent police pursuit and the motorway crash; including the quotes from Andrew and his girlfriend and those from the police officer being interviewed.

While many candidates combined both in their intros, some did not mention the pursuit or the death until the second half of the story. Several struggled with chronology and ended up confusing the reader. Despite the chance of a good intro, some went for a straight "Police are investigating..."

There were some sloppy errors, including the misspelling of Micklegate, even though it was given in the brief. Other candidates said the getaway car was stopped by the stinger. This was incorrect as the driver swerved to avoid it. It was also clear that some did not read their copy before submitting, losing valuable marks for those avoidable errors.

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

23 MARCH

This was a story which had drama and human interest.

A teenager on an early morning driving lesson with his mum, stalls his car on an unmanned level crossing – one that the family use several times a day to reach their nearby farm. The car was driven by 18-year-old James Byron and had been given to him by his grandfather, who died three months before.

While his mum, Sharon, ran to the emergency phone to call the operator to tell them the car had stalled, James got out and tried to push it.

When James and his mum initially approached the crossing the red/green lights were on green, although Mrs Byron saw them flickering. As they were on green, they assumed the 6.50am train from Tunstead had passed and it was safe to cross.

But the train was running 10 minutes late.

As James pushed the car, the train approached around a bend at 60mph. The driver sounded his horn, braked, but hit the car. James was knocked to the ground away from the track and suffered broken legs and severe bruising. The car was shunted 200 metres along the track.

There was drama from the start, backed up by strong quotes from the mother who saw the whole incident and thought her son was dead. There was also a good quote from the train driver and a comment from the surgeon.

A candidate's story should have also included the investigation about why the lights were on green, injuries to passengers and details about cancelled services with an information number for the public.

Despite the chance of a good intro, some candidates chose a straightforward one about the investigation before then telling the dramatic story of how a mother thought her son was dead after his car was hit on the crossing. Several candidates made the error of saying the train hit James; it did not, it hit the car. That cost many candidates valuable marks.

Some candidates did not give a location for the incident or missed James' address. Others did not mention the cancellations or explore the issue with the warning lights.

There were some sloppy errors, including the misspelling of Byron, even though it was given in the brief. Spelling was an issue for too many candidates, changing 'braking' to 'breaking' and not understanding the difference between 'practising' and 'practicing'. Some did not appear to read their copy before submitting, losing valuable marks for avoidable errors.

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

LOGBOOK – 33 candidates; 33 passed - 100 per cent

The March exam saw a number of good submissions from candidates which led to strong competition for the overall logbook prize.

It is pleasing to see that there were fewer failures to submit the correct copy on key tasks, whether cuttings or original submissions. Those who are due to submit a logbook are reminded to make sure that they check - and check again - to make sure that all key tasks have been completed correctly.

Elsewhere, there were no major issues with regards to specific key tasks.

As always, we 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 submitting for marking.

National Qualification in Journalism - comparative figures

	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017	NOV 2017	MAR 2018
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	90	72	71	69	76	59	57	53	63	42
No of passes	65	44	43	51	59	40	41	35	49	23
No of failures	25	28	28	18	17	19	16	18	14	19
% passed	72	61	61	74	78	68	72	66	78	55

FIRST-TIMERS										
No of candidates	65	49	51	50	57	43	43	41	43	33
No of passes	49	28	33	36	45	27	33	32	36	19
No of failures	16	21	18	14	12	16	10	9	7	14
% passed	75	57	65	72	79	63	77	78	84	58

RE-SITS										
No of candidates	25	23	20	19	19	16	14	12	20	9
No of passes	16	16	10	15	14	13	8	3	13	4
No of failures	9	7	10	4	5	3	6	9	7	5
% passed	64	70	50	79	74	81	57	25	65	44

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

	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017	NOV 2017	MAR 2018
NEWS INTERVIEW										
No of candidates	78	63	59	61	71	52	54	50	60	42
No of passes	63	49	43	47	60	35	42	35	47	27
No of failures	15	14	16	14	11	17	12	15	13	15
% passed	81	78	73	77	85	67	78	70	78	64

NEWS REPORT										
No of candidates	88	70	68	66	71	56	54	51	63	42
No of passes	66	45	44	52	56	40	39	34	49	23
No of failures	22	25	24	14	15	16	16	17	14	19
% passed	75	64	65	79	79	71	72	67	78	55

MEDIA LAW & PRACTICE										
No of candidates	81	61	60	59	65	49	50	48	46	37
No of passes	67	47	45	53	59	39	41	47	41	24
No of failures	14	14	15	6	6	10	12	1	5	13
% passed	83	77	75	90	91	80	82	98	89	65

	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017	NOV 2017	MAR 2018
LOGBOOK										
No of candidates	65	49	56	55	61	46	43	41	45	33
No of passes	65	42	53	50	58	45	42	41	45	33
No of failures	0	7	3	5	3	1	5	0	0	0
% passed	100	86	95	91	95	98	98	100	100	100