

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

November 2016

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In November, a total 59 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at 6 centres across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 40 candidates – a pass rate of 68 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

TED BOTTOMLEY AWARD (MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – £250)

Sponsored by Midland News Association

Rachel Howarth

Knutsford Guardian

An exceptional paper, in which Rachel demonstrated excellent law and ethical knowledge. This enabled her to gain high marks for each question, including a near-perfect, and the highest overall, mark for the ethics question.

It also helped that her answers were both logically and clearly expressed.

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

Alistair Grant

Edinburgh Evening News

Alistair made a good choice of content from the brief and speech to create a story full of human interest, ideal for local media. He then came up with useful illustration and follow-up ideas for part B, which put him ahead of the other candidates. A highly competent performance.

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

Alistair Grant

Edinburgh Evening News

This was an excellent effort by Alistair. From the strong, confident intro through to the logical structure, he captured the drama, had very good phrasing and told the story in a mature style.

In the words of the marker: 'A terrific flowing story'.

NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)

Ashleigh Withall-Prince

Ripley & Heanor News

An excellent logbook and one that is a good example to anyone setting out to compile the best of their own material. A good deal of hard work went into this submission, the inclusion of a wide range of impressive stories showing the breadth of talent. Judges were particularly impressed by strong submissions in the trainee's choice key tasks and intuitive use of press releases.

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

Philippa	Allen-Kinross	<i>Wimbledon Guardian</i>
Lucy	Ball	<i>Buxton Advertiser</i>
Jordan	Bluer	<i>Dover Express</i>
Enfys	Bosworth	<i>Tivyside Advertiser</i>
Georgina	Campbell	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Victoria	Castle	<i>Kentish Express</i>
Saul	Cooke-Black	<i>Stroud News & Journal</i>
Dan	Cooper	<i>Newbury Weekly News</i>
Elaine	Davies	<i>Lincolnshire Echo</i>
Grace	Earl	<i>Weston Worle & Somerset Mercury</i>
Isobel	Frodsham	<i>Leicester Mercury</i>
Alistair	Grant	<i>Edinburgh Evening News</i>
Naomi	Herring	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Amber	Hicks	<i>Swindon Advertiser</i>
Louise	Hill	<i>Bracknell News</i>
Daniel	Holland	<i>The Bolton News</i>
Rachel	Howarth	<i>Knutsford Guardian</i>
Maria	Hudd	<i>Eastbourne Gazette</i>
Charlotte	Jones	<i>Lincolnshire Echo</i>
Simon	Leonard	<i>Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph</i>
Kenneth	Lomas	<i>Middlewich Guardian</i>
Sarah	Marshall	<i>Doncaster Free Press</i>
Connor	McLoughlin	<i>Henley Standard</i>
Kate	McMullin	<i>The Bolton News</i>
Gemma	Mitchell	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>
Rebecca	Murphy	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Tara	O'Connor	<i>Baylis Media</i>
Christopher	Ord	<i>Newbury Weekly News</i>
Jemma	Page	<i>Nottingham Evening Post</i>
Alex	Peace	<i>Dorset Echo</i>
Lewis	Pennock	<i>Bristol Evening Post</i>
Matt	Reason	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>
Candice	Ritchie	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
George	Ryan	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Kit	Sandeman	<i>Burton Mail</i>
Bethany	Sharp	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>
Gemma	Sherlock	<i>Lancaster Guardian</i>
Hannah	Somerville	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Daniel	Windham	<i>Harrogate Advertiser</i>
Ashleigh	Withall-Prince	<i>Ripley & Heanor News</i>

The following candidate has now gained the National Qualification in Journalism for Press Photographers.

Leanne	Bagnall	<i>The Sentinel</i>
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CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

Just over two-thirds of entrants in the November sitting of the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) exams were successful.

The pass rate of 68% was 10% lower than the record 78% pass rate achieved in the July sitting. A total of 59 candidates took the exams – the lowest entry ever recorded – with 40 of them successful in all four sections and achieving senior status.

The e-logbook section saw the highest pass rate at 98%, while only 67% were successful in the interview section. Pass rates for news report and media law & practice were 71% and 80% respectively.

Chief examiner Steve Nelson said: “The low entry probably reflects the shrinking newspaper industry. However, it is expected that the number of candidates will show a small rise for the next sitting in March 2017.”

“The November sitting is always that bit more special for those candidates who achieve a pass because it makes for a fantastic early Christmas present.”

An outstanding performance by Alistair Grant, of the *Edinburgh Evening News*, saw him win the £250 prizes in both the news report and interview sections.

The other two £250 prize-winners were Rachel Howarth, of the *Knutsford Guardian*, who achieved the highest score for her media law & practice paper, and Ashleigh Withall-Prince, of the *Ripley & Heanor News*, who came top in the e-logbook section.

MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 49 candidates 39 passed – 80 per cent

Once again, this examination produced a high pass rate, which must be good news for editors especially in these days of almost instant publishing.

Contempt and defamation were thoroughly tested. Candidates were expected to know when and if Section 3 of the Contempt of Court Act would prevail if someone was “helping police with their inquiries” and whether the defence of honest opinion would hold up after a columnist’s stinging criticism of the behaviour of an MP. Most candidates made the correct calls.

In the court reporting section, examiners were expecting candidates to be up to date on the change to the discretionary powers of courts to issue orders to protect the identity of juveniles under the age of 18 involved in proceedings. This was highlighted after the March NQJ but still several candidates referred to Section 39 of the Children and Young Persons Act instead of Section 45 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act, which replaced it in April 2015. It is important that journalists are aware of changes that affect their work.

After the disappointing fall in the standard of answers for the ethics question in July, it was good to see a much better set this time. It concerned the need for care and sensitivity when covering a suicide inquest. Candidates were aware of the introduction of a separate clause, five, for how suicides should be reported and that Section 4, grief and shock, also had a bearing.

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 – 56 candidates; 40 passed – 71 per cent

News Report is a test of candidates' ability to record the spoken word and blend key aspects of a speech with background information to tell a comprehensive story. Reports of the speech alone, without any background, will not pass.

Shorthand always poses problems in this section. Candidates with weak shorthand are unable to get down accurate quotes and information which leads to either made-up direct quotes or an incomplete story.

There were two key aspects to the November paper: a local man had come forward at the 11th hour to claim his half of a £10million rollover Lottery jackpot and what he was going to spend the money on. Peter South was giving his entire prize to the donkey rescue charity he had his wife volunteer for, so that it could purchase land and facilities for a much-needed sanctuary.

Disappointingly, key aspects of the story were ignored or buried at the bottom as an after-thought. This paper was packed with good human interest detail which needed to be in the story and candidates must remember they are writing for a local audience who will want to know the full story.

The markers were looking for clean copy with a good clear explanation, in chronological order, of the information presented to candidates.

Speakers with titles always seem to pose problems for candidates and the November speech was no exception. Dame Alice Forrester, after initial introduction to the reader, should be called Dame Alice. Too many candidates incorrectly referred to her as Dame Forrester.

In part B the obvious sources to go to for further information in 15 minutes were Peter and the donkey charity. A weakness was noted in the candidates who didn't think of going to Peter or decided that they should not try because he was at work. A journalist should always try – remember the old maxim "nothing ventured, nothing gained".

Candidates suggesting a campaign must base it on firm foundations, not just produce an idea where they think the NCTJ wants one. Questionable was the suggestion of a campaign to see if readers agreed with Peter's decision to give his winnings to a donkey sanctuary.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 52 candidates; 35 passed – 67 per cent

This was an illegal drug operation story with some added twists – but twists which candidates should have had no issues with picking up.

A rival drugs gang wants to destroy a drugs den being run from a suburban house, in a quiet leafy avenue, on a residential estate.

They go to the house and, when the door is opened, they overpower the 'watchman' and attack him with a machete or similar weapon and drag him to the back of the house, leaving a trail of blood. His body is left in the kitchen. The gang then load up a quantity of drugs in a van, leaving at least £100,000 worth in the house. They use an accelerant to set fire to the bedrooms where cannabis is growing before escaping.

Candidates should have established who the house belonged to – an elderly woman who is at a nursing home suffering from dementia. Therefore, the house is rented out.

There were also plenty of good quotes from the detective chief inspector about the 'gangsters', the effect on the residents and about the victim. Witness accounts were also important to the story.

However, many candidates did not seem to grasp the facts:

One had the victim 'beaten to death'.

Some did not get the address right - Firtree instead of Firtrees.

The grey-haired man suddenly grew a grey beard.

Some said the gang got away with £100,000 worth of drugs.

There were also some strange phrases: the elderly woman was 'embedded' in the nursing home. The gang were 'uploading' the bin liners, another had the gang 'lining walls with bin liners.' Several had the wrong number plate for the van.

Quotes were an issue. Some candidates had inaccurate quotes. One quote from the DCI said: "My mind blusters."

All these errors led to a loss of marks.

Several candidates got caught up in the timing details too early in the story with fire crews "scrambled" and "racing" to the scene, rather than concentrating on the drama – the trail of blood etc.

Again shorthand appeared to be an issue and spellings and grammar could have been better.

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

LOGBOOK – 46 candidates; 45 passed – 98 per cent

A good round of submissions demonstrated that trainees have a clear grasp of what is required from the logbook key tasks. As always, we would recommend trainees double-check all uploaded copy carefully and also 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. The NCTJ will also be happy to give advice, ahead of submission.

National Qualification in Journalism - comparative figures

	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 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	88	90	69	71	90	72	71	69	76	59
No of passes	54	60	50	48	65	44	43	51	59	40
No of failures	34	30	19	23	25	28	28	18	17	19
% passed	62	67	72	68	72	61	61	74	78	68

FIRST-TIMERS										
No of candidates	49	55	48	52	65	49	51	50	57	43
No of passes	32	38	35	33	49	28	33	36	45	27
No of failures	17	17	13	19	16	21	18	14	12	16
% passed	65	69	73	64	75	57	65	72	79	63

RE-SITS										
No of candidates	39	35	21	19	25	23	20	19	19	16
No of passes	22	22	15	15	16	16	10	15	14	13
No of failures	17	13	6	4	9	7	10	4	5	3
% passed	56	63	71	79	64	70	50	79	74	81

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

	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016
NEWS INTERVIEW										
No of candidates	71	75	61	65	78	63	59	61	71	52
No of passes	54	57	49	53	63	49	43	47	60	35
No of failures	17	18	12	12	15	14	16	14	11	17
% passed	76	76	80	82	81	78	73	77	85	67

NEWS REPORT										
No of candidates	79	83	67	69	88	70	68	66	71	56
No of passes	52	57	50	47	66	45	44	52	56	40
No of failures	27	26	17	22	22	25	24	14	15	16
% passed	66	69	75	68	75	64	65	79	79	71

MEDIA LAW & PRACTICE										
No of candidates	86	83	54	61	81	61	60	59	65	49
No of passes	59	71	42	47	67	47	45	53	59	39
No of failures	27	12	12	14	14	14	15	6	6	10
% passed	69	86	78	77	83	77	75	90	91	80

	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016
LOGBOOK										
No of candidates	51	55	48	54	65	49	56	55	61	46
No of passes	51	54	46	54	65	42	53	50	58	45
No of failures	0	1	2	0	0	7	3	5	3	1
% passed	100	98	96	100	100	86	95	91	95	98