

**NATIONAL QUALIFICATION
IN JOURNALISM**

Examiners' Report

NOVEMBER 2015

NCTJ LEVEL 5 NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

November 2015

In November, a total of 71 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at nine centres across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 43 candidates – a pass rate of 61 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

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

Sponsored by Midland News Association

Charlotte Tobitt

Surrey Advertiser

A quite brilliant paper! To gain 96 per cent is an exceptional achievement. Both answers to questions one and two were spot on and question three was not far behind. Charlotte highlighted the problems, the reasons why and what could or should have been done to keep on the right side of the law or ethical considerations. Relevant case studies were also cited along with explanations of how they applied to the scenario and not just dropped in because they were in *Essential Law for Journalists*. On top of that, the answers were well-constructed and easy to read, leaving the examiners in no doubt what she was saying. Congratulations!

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

Charlotte Tobitt

Surrey Advertiser

Charlotte's clear, concise and comprehensive story was a joy to the markers, taking the reader clearly through all the aspects of the story in a bright newsy style. Her part B was exceptional with an inspired thoroughness that should take her far in her career.

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

Adam Parris-Long

The Luton News

Adam's story started with a punchy, strong intro and then carried the reader through. He set the scene well, incorporating the drama in a well-structured piece. There were good use of quotes, with a particularly strong first quote. Above all, the story was clean and accurate. Congratulations.

NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)

Joshua Searle

Surrey Mirror

An excellent example of an award-winning logbook that attracted high marks due to consistency across all key tasks. Maximum marks were awarded in the trainee's choice, features and pictures categories, along with human interest and community key tasks. A logbook worthy of the award.

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

Annabal	Bagdi	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Nathan	Briant	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Patrick	Christys	<i>The Westmorland Gazette</i>
Lauren	Cope	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Mark	Edwards	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Douglas	Faulkner-Gawlinski	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Emily	Ford	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>
James	Forrest	<i>Worcester News</i>
Clare Rose	Freeman	<i>Medway Messenger</i>
Sam	Gelder	<i>Ilford Recorder</i>
Joanna	Gilbert	<i>East Grinstead Courier</i>
Alexandra	Grainger	<i>Maldon and Burnham Standard</i>
Polly	Grice	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Emma	Hobley	<i>Braintree and Witham Times</i>
Carl	Jackson	<i>Express and Star</i>
Philip	Jones	<i>Southend Evening Echo</i>
Rebecca	King	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Michael William	Knowles	<i>Watford Observer</i>
Flossie	Mainwaring-Taylor	<i>The Westmorland Gazette</i>
Elizabeth	Massey	<i>Medway Messenger</i>
Chloe	Mosdell	<i>Canterbury Times</i>
Thomas	Norton	<i>Nottingham Post</i>
Zoie	O'Brien	<i>Waltham Forest Guardian</i>
Matthew	Oliver	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Adam	Parris-Long	<i>The Luton News</i>
Douglas	Patient	<i>East London and West Essex Guardian</i>
Charlie	Peat	<i>Enfield Independent</i>
Luke Anthony	Powell	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Oliver	Pritchard	<i>The Comet</i>
Stuart	Rust	<i>Gloucestershire Gazette</i>
Natasha Margaret Jean	Salmon	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
James	Scott	<i>The Comet</i>
Matthew	Scrafton	<i>Grimsby Telegraph</i>

Joshua	Searle	<i>Surrey Mirror</i>
Matthew	Simpson	<i>The Sentinel</i>
Thomas	Smuthwaite	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Rosanagh	Swarbrick	<i>Lancashire Evening Post</i>
Charlotte	Tobitt	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Oscar William	Tollast	<i>Dorset Echo</i>
Ron	Walker	<i>The Weston and Somerset Mercury</i>
Zachary	Ward	<i>Diss Express</i>
Sarah	Ward	<i>Kent and Sussex Courier</i>
Sheri Jean	Willis	<i>The Western Gazette</i>

CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

Almost two-thirds of candidates in the November sitting of the National Qualification in Journalism were successful.

The pass rate of 61% - with 43 candidates successful out of 71 taking the exam at nine centres - was identical to that achieved in the July sitting.

The NQJ remains a very robust test of a candidate's knowledge in areas of law and ethics and a practical examination of news reporting and interview skills, together with a demonstration of their ability in many key areas of journalism.

While it is disappointing that the pass rate remains at its lowest since July 2013, I am delighted for those candidates who have now achieved seniority in the industry.

The results included a remarkable performance by Charlotte Tobitt, of the *Surrey Advertiser*, who not only achieved the highest-ever overall points tally from the four examinations that make up the NQJ but also won the prize for the best media law and practice paper with a record 96 per cent and the prize for the best news report paper.

Adam Parris-Long, of *The Luton News*, won the prize for best news interview paper, while Joshua Searle, of the *Surrey Mirror*, was judged to have submitted the best logbook.

MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 60 candidates; 45 passed – 75 per cent

Success in the NQJ indicates that a trainee has achieved the standard required of a senior reporter. They must be able to demonstrate competence in law and ethics.

To have a good chance of passing this exam trainees must have good law knowledge and understanding of ethics, but that is not enough if they cannot apply that to the questions. Although candidates can take a copy of *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists* with them, they have to be comfortable with its contents because there is little time to study it in detail during the exam. Plenty of revision is required in the weeks leading up to the NQJ to give them the knowledge and confidence to tackle the questions. Candidates are, of course, also judged on the way they apply it. It is not enough to quote the relevant statutes and codes; they must also be able to relate them to what the question is asking. If publishing a photograph of someone wanted by the police would create a substantial risk of serious prejudice, explain why. In general, the law questions will feature defamation, contempt and reporting restrictions but other subjects will arise, along with the *Editors' Code of Practice*.

A thorough working knowledge of defamation and contempt, from what they are to what defences there are for publishing material, is essential for success in this exam. Both of these subjects are always tested.

Question three requires candidates to think about how ethics affect their jobs and it is STRONGLY recommended that all candidates, whether first-time or re-sits, attend refresher courses to learn more about the impact of ethics. Since Leveson, the impact of ethics on the media has never been greater and journalists must not only be conversant with the code but also with how the Independent Press Standards Organisation, to which the majority of the press is signed up to, is adjudicating on complaints. IPSO has been operating for more than a year and now has a large number of adjudications which candidates can refer to.

There are not necessarily right or wrong answers to the questions but candidates must be able to explain their thinking clearly so that examiners can see why conclusions are reached.

November's question concerned a road accident in which a pupil was injured outside her school, and what the dangers would be in reporting it in words and photographs online. It was based on an IPSO adjudication.

Such reports would bring into play Clause 3 (privacy), Clause 5 (intrusion into grief and shock) and Clause 6 (children). The question also required candidates to discuss whether public interest would come into play for Clauses 3 and 6. To score well candidates needed to have highlighted the clauses, explain why publishing details might breach them and how that could be overcome. Time needs to be used wisely to answer a question that requires as much thought as it does knowledge.

We advise candidates to keep as up-to-date as possible on media cases. This will help to keep fresh the knowledge gained on courses as well as providing examples of how the law works in real newspaper situations to help gain extra marks.

Useful reference points are the law section of HoldTheFrontPage, the Society of Editors' law briefings, IPSO adjudications and recent revisions to the *Editors' Code of Practice*, and the Judicial Studies Board's Reporting Restrictions in the Criminal Courts.

NEWS REPORT – 68 candidates; 44 passed – 65 per cent

Accuracy, news sense and shorthand were problems for many in the November news report.

Much of the inaccuracy is down to poor shorthand. Candidates were clearly struggling to keep up with the speech and concentrating so much on their shorthand that they were not listening to what was being said. In turn, this led to transcription problems and factual errors.

Candidates are reminded that by the time they sit the NQJ they should have improved their shorthand speed from the 100wpm diploma level to 120 wpm. Refresher courses often identify speeds nearer 80-90wpm and little time to make the vital improvement.

There can be no excuses for candidates who make errors copying names and facts from the brief – this is carelessness which costs vital marks. Taking time to double-check work before the end of the exam is essential.

In the November exam the story featured a local woman who had discovered a notebook, discarded by Sherlock Holmes' creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It contained a letter and the author's notes about a woman who witnessed a murder by Jack the Ripper and identified the culprit. Sir Arthur threw the notebook and letter away without taking further action and it was found by a chambermaid in the fire-grate. The chambermaid's great grand-daughter was set to make £1m from the sale of the book and letter at an auction the following Tuesday and it was disappointing how many candidates failed to pick up sufficiently on the good human interest story of a local woman set to become a millionaire. Instead the majority of candidates were keener to identify Jack the Ripper and gave only sketchy information about the source of the evidence.

In Part B markers are looking for the practicality of the ideas put forward. They questioned how easy it would be for candidates to obtain photos of all the Ripper's victims from an era when photography was still in its infancy, or whether they would be able to trace descendants of the victims. Tracing descendants of Lewis Carroll and Sir Arthur are likely to have been impossible in the 15 minutes available for getting additional comments.

The examiners urge candidates to get their shorthand up to speed, double-check their work and come up with practical ideas with flair.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 59 candidates; 43 passed – 73 per cent

This was a dramatic story about a millionaire businessman, Jason Blackwell, who was killed when his light aircraft crashed on his way home from putting the finishing touches to his wedding in France.

He radioed air traffic control to say there was a problem with his engine. He was offered another landing site. He said he would reply in five minutes but then radio contact was lost.

The plane came down in a field, witnessed by the farmer who gave some dramatic quotes about the plane's final seconds and how he found the pilot dead, still strapped in his seat.

There were good quotes provided in the statements from Jason's mother and fiancée.

There was also speculation about why the plane crashed; was it a fault or human error? The successful candidate will have also picked up the line that the reason may never be known.

Many candidates started with a dramatic intro but some did not mention who the victim was until the second or third paragraph. He was a prominent businessman in the area so he needed to be in the intro. Many candidates also delved straight into the statement from the mother, leaving the drama until later in the story.

Some candidates ignored the quotes from the flying club, which described Jason as "*one of the lads*", and the quote provided by the company secretary that the office would be closed as a mark of respect.

Some did include the background information about Jason's business which gave the story a more rounded read.

However, there are still issues with accuracy, resulting from either poor shorthand or insufficient time dedicated to checking copy before the end of the exam:

The Air Accident Investigations Branch was one that many tripped up on.

Some did not even get the correct spelling of Wandsley.

Dixter became Dixters and even Bixter.

Stalled became stooled.

Some candidates indicated the plane crashed on the farm building itself, instead of in a field.

Hangar became hanger.

Jason was altered to James.

A consistent error is 'post-mortem', missing the vital ending of 'examination'.

Overall, many candidates just did not seem able to picture the story before they put the words on the page and ended with a disjointed attempt at what was a dramatic story. Those who passed had good chronology and a readable writing style.

LOGBOOK – 56 candidates; 53 passed – 95 per cent

The November logbook submissions once again demonstrated that almost all candidates had a clear understanding of what was required in the compilation of this category. There were some excellent examples of work which showcased the current participants. All key tasks were handled well and there were no major issues to report with regard to the standard of submissions.

However, there was again the issue of a few candidates failing to upload either a cutting or original copy for their key tasks, leading to duplicated submissions. Markers must be able to see both submissions to make a judgement on the key task and therefore such duplication will be marked as a fail on the key task and on the logbook overall.

Candidates are urged to double-check to ensure they have the correct elements for all the key tasks. As always we encourage any candidate who encounters issues compiling their logbook to speak to their editor/trainer or to the NCTJ. We will be happy to give advice.

National Qualification in Journalism - comparative figures

	MAR 2013	JUL 2013	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015
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>
No of candidates	110	102	88	90	69	71	90	72	71
No of passes	59	50	54	60	50	48	65	44	43
No of failures	51	52	34	30	19	23	25	28	28
% passed	54	49	62	67	72	68	72	61	61

FIRST-TIMERS									
No of candidates	66	51	49	55	48	52	65	49	51
No of passes	33	32	32	38	35	33	49	28	33
No of failures	33	19	17	17	13	19	16	21	18
% passed	50	63	65	69	73	64	75	57	65

RE-SITS									
No of candidates	44	51	39	35	21	19	25	23	20
No of passes	26	18	22	22	15	15	16	16	10
No of failures	18	33	17	13	6	4	9	7	10
% passed	59	35	56	63	71	79	64	70	50

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

	MAR 2013	JUL 2013	NOV 2013	MAR 2014	JUL 2014	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015
NEWS INTERVIEW									
No of candidates	99	89	71	75	61	65	78	63	59
No of passes	53	58	54	57	49	53	63	49	43
No of failures	46	31	17	18	12	12	15	14	16
% passed	54	65	76	76	80	82	81	78	73

NEWS REPORT									
No of candidates	103	96	79	83	67	69	88	70	68
No of passes	49	57	52	57	50	47	66	45	44
No of failures	54	39	27	26	17	22	22	25	24
% passed	48	59	66	69	75	68	75	64	65

MEDIA LAW & PRACTICE									
No of candidates	97	86	86	83	54	61	81	61	60
No of passes	55	37	59	71	42	47	67	47	45
No of failures	42	49	27	12	12	14	14	14	15
% passed	57	43	69	86	78	77	83	77	75

LOGBOOK									
No of candidates	66	51	51	55	48	54	65	49	56
No of passes	65	49	51	54	46	54	65	42	53
No of failures	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	7	3
% passed	98	96	100	98	96	100	100	86	95