

# NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

AUGUST 2021



# NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

This examiners' report covers the sittings of the Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) in 2020-21 (November 2020, March 2021 and July 2021).

Across the 2020-21 academic year, a total of 94 candidates sat the exams for the NQJ. Over the three sittings, a total of 56 candidates achieved the qualification, a pass rate of 60 per cent.

The next examiners' report is due to be published in August 2022 and will cover the NQJ sittings in November 2021, March 2022 and July 2022.

## AWARD WINNERS 2020-21

The award winners listed below have been selected from the candidates who sat the NQJ in November 2020, March 2021 and July 2021.



### **MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE AWARD, SPONSORED BY REVIEWED & CLEARED – £750**

**James Robinson, *Hexham Courant***

James Robinson (88%). James produced an excellent exam that scored highly in all four sections, especially the Section 1 answers, which were near-perfect. He not only showed good knowledge, but was also able to apply it in a sensible and realistic manner. A bonus was the lucidity with which he constructed his answers, making it easy for the marker to follow. James is thoroughly deserving of his award. Congratulations!



### **PRACTICAL JOURNALISM SKILLS AWARD, SPONSORED BY ESSO – £750**

**Brogan Maguire, *Harrogate Advertiser***

Brogan Maguire (78%). Brogan's big news story exam was an excellent example of all-round competence in both journalism and working the newsroom to effect. She gave all-encompassing answers to every question as well as writing crisp informative stories as the scenario developed. She clearly understands the requirements of a modern newsroom, using social media to effect to support her coverage, engaging with her audience. Brogan is a well-deserving winner.



### **E-LOGBOOK AWARD, SPONSORED BY NEWSQUEST – £750**

**Jim Scott, *The Northern Echo***

Jim Scott (85%). This was a very impressive logbook which consistently scored high marks across all key tasks. The candidate clearly excelled when it came to news stories, but social media was also a key strength while the trainee choice submission proved to have great depth. It was a logbook which could be used as an example for others to follow and one which markers have no hesitation in nominating for our e-logbook award for this sitting.

## The candidates listed below gained the National Qualification in Journalism in 2020-21:

Simon Allin	<i>Watford Observer</i>	Liam Keen	<i>Wolverhampton Express and Star</i>
Laura Andrew	<i>Doncaster Free Press</i>	Alice Knight	<i>Reading Chronicle</i>
Jonathan Ashby	<i>Newbury Weekly News</i>	Annie Lewis	<i>The News Portsmouth</i>
Georgia Banks	<i>Northern Echo</i>	Andra Maciucă	<i>The London Economic</i>
Thomas Steven Banner	<i>Worcester News</i>	Abigail Maclure	<i>Yorkshire Evening Post</i>
Georgia Barrow	<i>The Comet</i>	Brogan Maguire	<i>Harrogate Advertiser</i>
Richard Bellis	<i>Northern Echo</i>	Adam Maidment	<i>Manchester Evening News</i>
Charlotte Bentley	<i>Shropshire Star</i>	Rebecca Marano	<i>Yorkshire Evening Post</i>
Lewis Berrill	<i>East London Guardian</i>	Natasha Meek	<i>The Telegraph Argus</i>
Laura Bill	<i>Herts Advertiser</i>	Jessica Molyneux	<i>Liverpool Daily Post &amp; Echo</i>
Michael Boniface	<i>Ham &amp; High</i>	Daniel Morris	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Lauren Brownlie	<i>Clydebank Post</i>	Martina Moscariello	<i>Salisbury Journal Newspaper</i>
Sarah Burgess	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>	Gurjeet Nanrah	<i>Nottinghamshire Live</i>
Matthew Calderbank	<i>The Lancashire Post</i>	Katie May Nelson	<i>Medway Messenger</i>
Matthew Critchell	<i>Echo Newspaper, Basildon</i>	Abigail Nicholson	<i>Liverpool Echo</i>
Bradley Deas	<i>Bradford Telegraph and Argus</i>	Ryan Nicolson	<i>The Shetland Times</i>
Sean Delaney	<i>Medway Messenger</i>	Nathan Okell	<i>Warrington Guardian</i>
Belinda Dickins	<i>The News, Portsmouth</i>	Tom Orde	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>
Francesca Edwards	<i>Maldon &amp; Burnham Standard</i>	Isabella Perrin	<i>Bracknell News</i>
Ryan Evans	<i>Basingstoke Gazette</i>	Lisa Rand	<i>Liverpool Daily Post &amp; Echo</i>
Harriet Evans	<i>Shropshire Star</i>	Jack Rawlins	<i>Newsquest Midlands South Stourbridge</i>
Neil Fatkin	<i>The News, Portsmouth</i>	James Robinson	<i>Hexham Courant</i>
Joseph Fletcher	<i>The Westmorland Gazette</i>	Aaliyah Rugg	<i>The Leader</i>
Joanna Gravett	<i>JPI Media</i>	Jim Scott	<i>The Northern Echo</i>
Holly Hume	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>	Liam Soutar	<i>Wigan Observer</i>
Sam Johnson	<i>Sunderland Echo</i>	Adrian Williams	<i>Baylis Media Ltd</i>
Ben Jolley	<i>Cambridgeshire Times</i>	Henry Woodsford	<i>Weston Mercury</i>
Steve Jones	<i>The Star</i>		
Carly-May Kavanagh	<i>Mid Sussex Times</i>		



# CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

**Firstly, I want to congratulate all the successful candidates who have achieved their NQJ in recent months.**

It has been no mean feat given the extraordinary challenges of the past year and a half. I would also like to offer my encouragement to those who haven't quite made it over the line. You will – and I look forward to that next time round.

The latest set of results are hugely encouraging, particularly the 81 per cent pass rate in media law and ethics in practice and a superb 98 per cent pass rate on the logbooks – a testament to some fine journalism.

Many journalists have found themselves working from their bedrooms or dining room tables during the pandemic, away from the buzz, close support and creative camaraderie of the newsroom.

Indeed, for some new to the industry, that is all they have known so far. This makes their work in reporting the news day in and day out even more impressive – and one that is more important than ever for so many reasons.

As things return to more like normal, we look forward to an even better set of results in the next round of exams.

Lastly I would like to pay tribute to the wonderful staff at the NCTJ who have worked extraordinarily hard and flexibly to ensure the work of the organisation has continued uninterrupted during the pandemic and all our trainees have received the very best support and guidance.

**Andy Martin**

**Chief examiner, National Qualification in Journalism**



# MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE

**74 candidates; 60 passed – 81 per cent**

**After all the disruptions over the past 18 months, candidates are to be congratulated for coping so well with this examination. Passes by candidates from the community journalism cohort were slightly higher, but this could well be due to them having taken their diploma law and ethics examinations more recently and having more mentoring and training while they were working than the other candidates.**

To have the best chance of success candidates must have good law knowledge and understanding of ethics, but that is not enough if it is not applied to the questions. Although candidates can take a copy of *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists* into the exam with them, they must be comfortable with its contents because there is little time to study it in detail during the exam. It is not enough to quote the relevant statutes and clauses; candidates must also be able to relate them to what the question is asking. Be analytical, what is the problem, why is that and do I have a defence? If not, what should I do?

Section four requires candidates to think about how ethics affect their jobs. There are not necessarily right or wrong answers, but candidates must be able to explain their thinking clearly so that examiners can see why they have come to the conclusions that they have made.

This question needs time, and it was evident over the three exams sat this year that some candidates did not leave themselves enough time to answer this question. It requires more than just identifying the clauses; candidates must also apply them to the scenario. All too often a lack of application leads to reduced marks. Candidates should not forget to discuss public interest in their answer to this question and the reason it might be relevant.

Good time management is key to successfully completing this exam. Candidates should be aware of how much time they have overall, and how many marks each question is worth. For example, a 20 mark question will need more time to answer than an 8 mark question.

Overall, the top-performing candidates produced some superb answers, relating their knowledge to the exam scenarios, analysing the problems, and giving clear and well-structured answers. As always, each exam had defamation and contempt questions, along with copyright, confidentiality, court reporting restrictions, anonymity requirements and numerous clauses from the Editors' Code of Practice.

Keeping up to date with legal and ethical news is also essential, and not just to help pass this element of the NQJ. Questions are often framed around real-life incidents, with the question in section four always based on an IPSO adjudication. Candidates are advised to sign up to either Hold the Front Page or Press Gazette to see their reports on legal and ethical issues.

**Crispin Clark**  
**Chief moderator, media law and ethics in practice**





# PRACTICAL JOURNALISM SKILLS EXAMS – BIG NEWS STORY AND COMMUNITY JOURNALISM

86 candidates; 54 passed – 63 per cent

**The big news story and community journalism practical exams form the practical journalism skills aspect of the NQJ, and are designed to test a trainee's readiness for senior responsibility in the newsroom.**

The big news story involves covering a fast-paced story for modern-day publication across all, or any, sections of the media and requires the trainee to adapt to changing circumstances as well as being mindful of everyday necessities. The story develops through progressive social media postings, press releases, statements and video/audio recordings in the same way a major news story would evolve in the newsroom.

Because of Covid-19, there have been no external exam centres during the past 12 months and candidates either sat the exams in office or at home.

Candidates needed to remember the key principles of journalism, law and ethics that they would face in their day-to-day work. Some questions change in each exam, such as health and safety or internal communications. The information sought in these questions needs to be pertinent to the story and it is clear some candidates are learning lists of generic suggestions rather than relating their answers to the actual story.

The November exam was about a major high street fire triggered by arsonists who had been on a spree in the town for several weeks. It began with three cars being torched overnight in different parts of the town, social media posts and images, and moved

swiftly to the high street fire, shops and businesses being closed and the hunt for a homeless man who was known to have been sleeping in the area. His dog was found quite early on in the story, but the man's whereabouts didn't become apparent until the very end. There were prolific social media posts, interviews with traders, the chamber of commerce, and the fire brigade. Some candidates showed a tendency to rely on official statements to tell the story rather than the human angles, and several demoted the search for the homeless man as an after-thought.

The March exam focused on escalating reports of missing or dead cats. It began with a local radio bulletin about a Parkfield owner finding her cat dead and mutilated in her garden. These sparked reports of other incidents and a police investigation. The story took a twist with the capture of feral mink and the revelation that the mink were spreading a Danish variant of Covid-19 that had not been identified in Britain before. Most candidates did well in this exam but a few ignored the human-interest aspects, concentrating on official statements. It is important to remember that readers want human interest elements and mystery deaths of pet cats is an emotive subject.

The July exam featured an impending major storm with warning of potential damage, transport upheaval and danger to life. The key to the story was the time of the storm's arrival (30-40 minutes), and the strength of Storm Kate as it was named by the met office. The story culminated with soldiers rescuing a vicar who had become trapped under a fallen tree and sustained life-changing injuries.



The community journalism exam is designed for community journalists, many of whom are apprentices, who began their careers in 2019. The first of these candidates took their NQJ in March 2021.

The exam is based on a news scenario which tests the skills and knowledge required by candidates who are working in under-reported communities. A central part of the exam is a major news story, designed to test news selection and writing an engaging story to length from a wealth of material.

As the story unfolds, a number of legal/ethical/regulatory issues are thrown up that challenge the candidate to say how they would deal with these issues. These need the candidate to identify the issues, say what they would do and why and explore any potential ramifications of their actions. Sometimes there is a “right or wrong” answer – sometimes there is not. In whichever circumstances, candidates should make clear their course of action, justify it and demonstrate an understanding of what the possible consequences are.

The March exam featured a community battle over right of way across a private beach, with strong opinions from both the residents and the owners before a compromise was reached.

The July exam focused on plans to build a motorcycle track for youngsters, its aims and objectives and the people behind the scheme. There was a strong ethical string to this story with the key source demanding anonymity and testing the journalist’s knowledge of how to deal with this.

Some candidates sitting the community journalism exam showed a tendency to play it safe with the stories and their answers, but candidates demonstrated good knowledge of ethics, which tweets and Facebook posts they could share and why.

**Faith Lee**  
**Chief moderator, the big news story and community journalism**

## E-LOGBOOK

**64 candidates; 63 passed – 98 per cent**

**This has been a pleasing period for logbook submissions as candidates really do seem to have grasped the nettle in terms of what is required.**

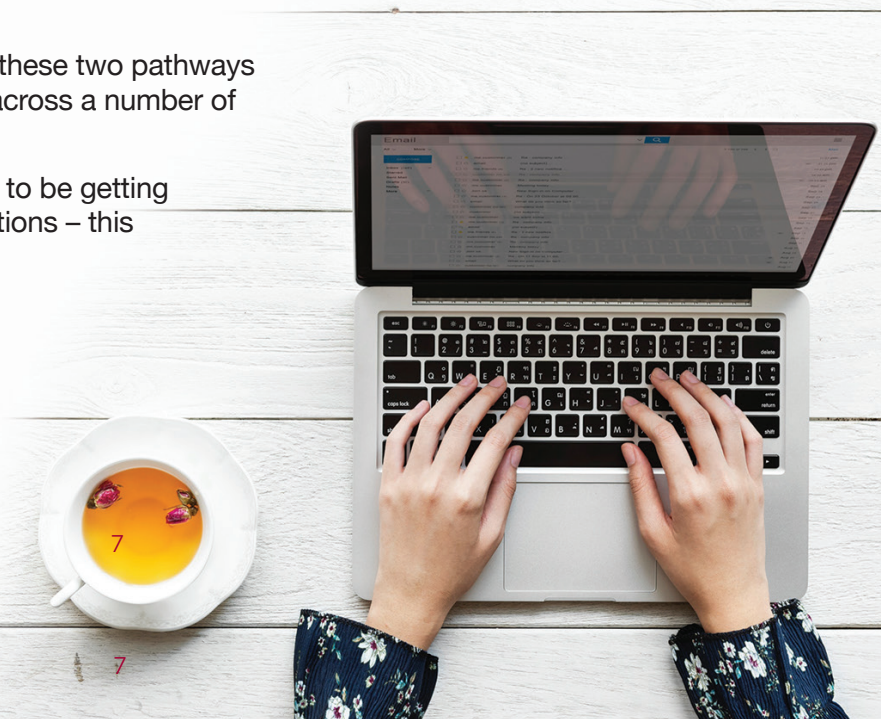
The e-logbook categories are set to challenge candidates to produce evidence that demonstrates their ability across a wide range of journalistic key tasks in their particular role. Categories are tailored to meet the needs of news journalists, community journalists, production journalists, local democracy reporters and specialist brand publishers. Logbooks submitted this year covered news and community journalism roles.

The standard of key tasks submitted across these two pathways has risen and markers noted stronger work across a number of these tasks.

It has also been noted that candidates seem to be getting more support from within their own organisations – this and the rise in quality may be connected.

As always, if any future candidates have any issues or questions concerning the logbook, please do not hesitate to contact the NCTJ in the first instance.

**Darren Isted**  
**Chief moderator, e-logbook**



# RESULTS ANALYSIS

## Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism results 2020-21

The below results summary details the overall NQJ results achieved in 2020-21:

TOTAL ENTRY	
No of candidates	94
No of passes	56
No of failures	38
<b>% passed</b>	<b>60</b>

The below results summary details the breakdown of NQJ results achieved by exam section:

PRACTICAL SKILLS EXAMS	
No of candidates	86
No of passes	54
No of failures	32
<b>% passed</b>	<b>63</b>

MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE	
No of candidates	74
No of passes	60
No of failures	14
<b>% passed</b>	<b>81</b>

E-LOGBOOK	
No of candidates	64
No of passes	63
No of failures	1
<b>% passed</b>	<b>98</b>

The below results summary details the breakdown of the overall NQJ results achieved by Pass, Merit and Distinction:

	NO OF CANDIDATES	% ACHIEVED
<b>Distinction</b>	20	36
<b>Merit</b>	24	43
<b>Pass</b>	12	21





NCTJ 2021



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