

National Qualification in Journalism

Examiners' Report

December 2019



nctj

National Council for the
Training of Journalists

National Qualification in Journalism

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This examiners' report covers the sittings of the Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) in July 2019 and November 2019.

On 5 July a total of 38 candidates sat the Level 6 NQJ. There were three centres running the exams and seven in-office sittings across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 24 candidates – a pass rate of 63 per cent.

On 8 November a total of 31 candidates sat the Level 6 NQJ. There were three centres running the exams and 11 in-office sittings across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 21 candidates – a pass rate of 68 per cent.

The next examiners' report is due to be published in August 2020 and will cover the NQJ sittings in March and July 2020. Thereafter, an annual report will be published in August each year, covering the NQJ sittings in November, March and July.

Award winners

This report details the award winners from the July 2019 exam sitting. From November 2019, the NCTJ will be issuing annual section awards for the National Qualification in Journalism.

Candidates who sat the NQJ in November 2019 will therefore be considered for the annual section awards for the 2019-20 academic year, alongside candidates who sit in March 2020 and July 2020.

These award winners will be announced in the examiners' report published in August 2020.

Award winners July 2019

Media law award, sponsored by Reviewed and Cleared - £750

Jessica Frank-Keyes, *Eastern Daily Press*

Jessica Frank-Keyes (86%). Jessica produced an excellent paper that scored highly in all four sections, especially the Section 2 answers, which were near-perfect. Her approach to the ethical question was well thought out, highlighting the problems and adopting a sensible way in how they should have been dealt with. Congratulations!



Practical journalism skills award, sponsored by Esso - £750

Rhoda Ferguson Morrison, *Bury Free Press*

Rhoda Ferguson Morrison (80%). Rhoda demonstrated a high standard of competence in all areas in the first ever sitting of the big news story exam, showing she was more than ready for the step up to a senior journalist role. For question 10 she produced an excellent story, written in a mature, competent style which captured the drama of the rail crash.



Logbook award, sponsored by Newsquest - £750

James Carr, formerly *Eastern Daily Press*

James Carr (84%). This was a superb logbook and an excellent example to those seeking to compile a clear summary of their progress in the industry. While this was strong across all categories, it was refreshing to note that the news entries received top marks, a clear sign that the basics of storytelling were in evidence. Trainee's choice was also strong but high marks for both handling data and visual journalism showed that James had a firm grasp on all 'newer' elements.



From the sittings in July and November, the following candidates have now gained the National Qualification in Journalism:

Samual	Beamish	<i>Dorset Echo</i>
Imogen	Braddick	<i>Saffron Walden Reporter</i>
Hannah	Butler	<i>The Guardian</i>
Fiona	Callingham	<i>The News, Portsmouth</i>
James	Carr	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>
Lydia May	Chantler-Hicks	<i>Kentish Gazette</i>
Sophie-May	Clarke	<i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>
Isobel	Cotogni	<i>Warrington Guardian</i>
Thomas Ryan	Earnshaw	<i>The Lancashire Post</i>
Adam	Everett	<i>Warrington Guardian</i>
Amy	Farnworth	<i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>
Jessica	Farrington	<i>Warrington Guardian</i>
Rhoda	Ferguson-Morrison	<i>Bury Free Press</i>
Jessica	Frank-Keyes	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Olivia	Gantzer	<i>Reading Chronicle</i>
Amy	Gibbons	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>
Katherine	Heslop	<i>Saffron Walden Reporter</i>
Danielle	Hoe	<i>Lincolnshire Echo</i>
Alessia Carlotta	Ilaria Manzoni	<i>The Guardian</i>
Sabrina	Johnson	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Harrison	Jones	<i>Metro</i>
Priya	Kingsley-Adam	<i>Suffolk Free Press</i>
Jack	Lenton	<i>Congleton Chronicle</i>
Jason	Lewis	<i>Bournemouth Echo</i>
Nathan	Louis	<i>Watford Observer</i>
Anna	MacSwan	<i>Kentish Gazette</i>
Melissa	Major	<i>News and Star</i>
Bradley	Marshall	<i>The Bolton News</i>
Seamus	McDonnell	<i>The Bolton News</i>
James	Mutch	<i>Leigh Journal</i>
Amy	Pantall	<i>Wiltshire Times</i>
Bethany	Pridding	<i>Burton Mail</i>
April	Roach	<i>Romford Recorder</i>

Carly	Roberts	<i>Northampton Chronicle</i>
George	Roberts	<i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>
Lucy	Roberts	<i>Derbyshire Times</i>
James	Roberts	<i>Oxford Mail</i>
Milly	Salkeld	<i>The News, Portsmouth</i>
Katy Eloise	Sandalls	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>
Rory	Smith	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Daniel	Taylor	<i>The Mail</i>
Alastair	Ulke	<i>Northampton Chronicle</i>
Aaron	Walawalkar	<i>RightsInfo</i>
Joseph	Wright	<i>Kentish Gazette</i>
Maria	Zaccaro	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>

Chief examiner's summary

July 2019 saw the first sittings for the Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism, which replaced the Level 5 NQJ following an industry wide review of the qualification. There are a number of pathways in the new qualification, including news journalist (print/online or broadcast/online); production journalist; and community journalist. The assessments for the Level 6 NQJ include a two-hour media law and ethics in practice exam; a practical, skills-based exam (the big news story for news journalists/production journalism for production journalists) and a revised and updated e-logbook assessment. The online exams are delivered via Cirrus, the NCTJ's online assessment platform. The move to assessment on Cirrus has been received well with positive feedback from candidates and markers.

Across July and November 2019, a total of 69 candidates sat the exams for the Level 6 NQJ. Over the two sittings, a total of 63 per cent of trainees achieved the qualification. Out of the 69 candidates who sat the exams, 45 were successful in all three assessments – achieving 'senior journalist' status. Across the two sittings, there was an overall pass rate of 69 per cent in the media law and ethics in practice exam. The practical journalism skills exam (big news story and production journalism) had an overall pass rate of 82 per cent, and there was an overall pass rate of 99 per cent for the e-logbook.

An excellent performance by Jessica Frank Keyes, of the *Eastern Daily Press*, in the July sitting of the qualification saw her win the £750 prize for media law and ethics in practice. Special congratulations also go to the other two prize winners for July who each receive £750: Rhoda Ferguson Morrison (*Bury Free Press*) for the practical journalism skills exam (big news story); and James Carr (formerly of the *Eastern Daily Press*) for e-logbook.

I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to all those who have achieved the qualification since July and lots of encouragement to those who haven't quite made it this time around. The NQJ results have been extremely heartening. The new assessments reflect the reality of daily life in the newsroom today with all the pressures, challenges and demands upon multimedia journalists. The assessments are not just an exercise in writing a good story and having an in-depth understanding of the news gathering process – they are also a test of the legal and ethical challenges and questions that journalists increasingly face in their day-to-day work. We can be confident that the NQJ gives today's journalists the very best and most relevant platform upon which to build their career, equipping them to carry out a role that arguably has never been more important.

Andy Martin, chief examiner, National Qualification in Journalism

Media law and ethics in practice

Candidates appear to have coped well with the extended examination, although there was some evidence that some had not left themselves enough time to complete the ethics question in section four of the exam.

Two thirds of candidates passing in the July sitting, half of which got in the 60-69 per cent range. The highest mark was an excellent 86 per cent. In the November sitting, most of the passes were in the 60-69 per cent range and only one candidate scored more than 80 per cent.

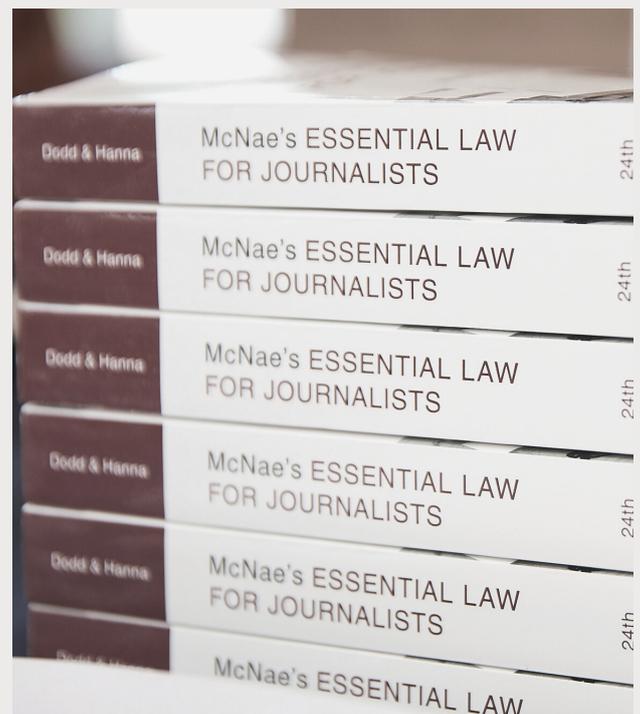
Exam summary: July 2019

Section one was generally well-answered, but several candidates did not highlight the importance of checking to see if the case was still active as the one-year arrest warrant was over. Such a practical step should be obvious to news reporters.

In question two, a similar number did not pick up contempt dangers posed in a report from a preliminary hearing.

Section two had elements of defamation and sexual offences anonymity. Some candidates missed the libel dangers involved in publishing a letter which made claims about the behaviour of an unnamed teacher and that someone addressing a group of journalists and answering their questions would constitute a press conference and therefore gain qualified privilege for publishing defamatory material.

Most of those went for honest opinion, which would have failed as there was not facts or privilege information on which to base the opinion.



Section 3 concentrated on whether the police can stop you taking photographs in a public area and the ethical problems in using photos that would give away the identity of a victim of a crash, who might die and whose family and friends might not be aware of the accident. This produced some excellent answers.

Section 4 produced many good answers, and in some cases excellent ones, but there were signs that some candidates had not left themselves enough time to tackle a question that needs thought. The scenario centred on interviewing a young boy whose father and sister had been involved in a water-skiing accident while abroad. Examiners were looking for answers that covered Clauses 1 (Accuracy), 2 (Privacy), 3 (Harassment), 4 (Intrusion into grief or shock) and 6 (Children), all of which were likely to have been breached.

Exam summary: November 2019

Section 1 was generally well-answered, but a few candidates did not know that an official report issued by a council on the matter of public interest requires the right of reply, if requested, from anyone defamed in the report. This is worrying as official statements from councils are a staple diet for journalists. However, there were some strong answers on Clause 10 and why there was public interest in allowing it to be breached.

Section 2 was also well-answered in the main. A few candidates did not know discretionary power to give a witness anonymity came from Section 46 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 and got it mixed up with the Contempt of Court Act 1981. A couple of candidates thought contemporaneous reporting from court was covered by qualified privilege, but there were good answers on what requirements must be met to identify a victim of a sexual offence, or in this section a victim under the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Section 3 had elements of defamation, confidentiality and copyright of Clause 14. There were some good answers, with everyone realising confidentiality was an issue, however some candidates did not pick up on the defamation dangers involved in publishing a leaked document nor the breach of copyright implications.

Section 4 produced some excellent answers, but as in previous examinations, it was obvious some candidates had not given themselves enough time to tackle a complex question. Examiners were looking for answers that covered Clauses 2 (Privacy), 4 (Intrusion into grief or shock) and 6 (Children), all of which were likely to have been breached without adopting the right course of action.

**Crispin Clark, chief moderator
Media law and ethics in practice**

Practical journalism skills

Big news story exam

July 2019 saw the first sitting of the practical journalism skills exam, with 34 candidates sitting the big news story. A total of 26 candidates sat the exam in November 2019.

The big news story is designed to test the candidate's ability to deal with a breaking story from the newsroom, including their time management skills. The exam features a breaking major news story using all the features of a newsroom working in digital, TV, radio and print.

In addition to covering the story, candidates are asked to explain how they would use social media to best effect, including analytics, the actions they would take to inform and involve others, and to consider communications and management.

The stories contained elements of ethics, law and the need to verify the information that is presented for accuracy. There are four sections in the exam, and each are timed to replicate the pressures of newsroom deadlines.



Exam summary: July 2019

The July exam featured a commuter train derailment in isolated countryside with many trapped and injured. As the story unfolded the death toll rose.

Pointers for candidates include the need to verify information that is presented at the outset. Unless the initial source is one of authority, in question 1 the candidate must include steps they would take to verify the tip-off and should not assume it is accurate.

With social media, candidates must use it to effect. Hashtags must be relevant and specific – a vague #traincrash could produce tweets from anywhere in the world. Using Facebook to seek information needs posts that would engage readers and encourage them to make contact with further information.

Stories in questions 3 and 10 need to summarise the essential information.

In this case the location, specific train, what has happened and what is taking place, supported by well-chosen quotes. Inaccuracies, particularly of information that is given in the section information, were penalised.

Candidates generally understood the communication essentials, listing who they would inform in the office about the story and the reasons why. Most candidates clearly understood the potential problems with photographs in the ethical question and also managed to avoid the pitfalls of the irrelevant tweet. There were some timing issues for a small number of candidates, particularly in section two where questions were not completed. Overall, however, the results were good.

Exam summary: November 2019

A government decision to place a moratorium on fracking seven days before the NQJ exams were sat, meant the November exam was updated to reflect both the government's decision and the forthcoming General Election.

A huge anti-fracking celebration party planned by South Torside Against Fracking Forever (STAFF) began with plans for 2,000 protesters to meet up at the now closed Byron Lane fracking site operated by Parham Oil and Gas.

As the story unfolded the numbers rose to in excess of 3,000 and the guests included a Hollywood film star, actors

and politicians. This was a major event and candidates needed to understand the implications of trying to cover a gathering of over 3,000 people. Health and safety considerations formed one of the questions and overall, candidates handled this well.

Suggested hashtags let some candidates down. Examples of #party, #celebration and #fracking would be unlikely to direct the Twitter community to the specific action at South Torside.

Facebook was not always used to best effect to encourage people to make contact with information. In a gathering as large as this, the media group would be heavily dependent on people tweeting from the party to gather information and images.

Accuracy is paramount and candidates are reminded to check their work carefully before the end of the exam to avoid errors such as the misspelling of names given in the section information.

Overall, it is clear that candidates are embracing the big news story exam and its relevance to newsrooms today. In the final section for question 10, it is encouraging to see that candidates were able to react to the information as it was released, especially the new angle which appeared in the final 15 minutes.

**Faith Lee, chief moderator
The big news story**

Practical journalism skills

Production journalism exam

The NQJ for production journalists was successfully introduced in July 2019.

This specific pathway is tailored for the role of a journalism sub-editor with candidates sitting the media law and ethics in practice exam, a skills-based production journalism exam and completing an e-logbook of evidence that includes ten specific categories.

The production journalism exam is designed to test advanced editing skills that are essential across digital and print; and test an understanding of key skills such as structuring stories for online, selecting and effectively cropping pictures, and promoting stories on social media.

It was sat by four candidates from *The Guardian's* trainee subs scheme and the level of commitment and standard of work was good. Three of the four candidates gained a pass mark in their first attempt. Higher scoring candidates demonstrated a wide range of production skills, demonstrating real promise for the future.

**John Dilley, chief moderator
Production journalism**





E-Logbook

Assessment summary: July 2019

This was a strong entry with 97 per cent of candidates passing the assessment. It was pleasing to note that candidates have adapted well to the recent changes to the key tasks.

There have been no major issues either with the introduction of the new categories or with the elements which are required for entry.

It is worth reminding candidates that they must still ensure the correct key tasks have been submitted. Extra checks of content should be built into the process of compiling the entry.

Assessment summary: November 2019

These were good submissions and the calibre of the higher performing entries has risen markedly.

It was pleasing to see that the core fundamentals of good storytelling and writing remain strong and that candidates also have a firm grasp of the newer key task areas.

We would advise all those compiling 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.

**Darren Isted, chief moderator
E-logbook**

Comparative figures

Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism results summary

Total entry

	July	November	Total
No of candidates	38	31	69
No of passes	24	21	45
No of failures	14	10	24
% passed	63	68	63

First-timers

No of candidates	32	19	51
No of passes	23	12	35
No of failures	9	7	16
% passed	72	63	69

Re-sits

No of candidates	6	12	18
No of passes	1	9	10
No of failures	5	3	8
% passed	17	75	56

Comparative figures

Analysis of figures for each exam section

Practical skills exam

	July	November	Total
No of candidates	38	26	64
No of passes	30	21	52
No of failures	8	4	12
% passed	79	85	82

Media law and ethics in practice

No of candidates	38	29	67
No of passes	27	19	46
No of failures	11	10	21
% passed	71	66	69

E-logbook

No of candidates	32	20	52
No of passes	31	20	51
No of failures	1	0	1
% passed	97	100	99



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