



# NCTJ QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17





# Introduction

**The NCTJ quality assurance and standards (QA&S) committee has been operational since 2007. It meets annually, or more frequently when required, to oversee quality, standardisation and fairness across all qualifications and services.**

Areas considered, monitored and discussed by the committee include:

- standardisation – moderation, centre spot checks, results analysis
- customer service – centre and candidate feedback, complaints
- equal opportunities
- reasonable adjustments and special considerations
- appeals
- exam incidents

- suspected malpractice and maladministration
- compliance with Ofqual, CCEA (Northern Ireland) and Qualifications Wales' general conditions of recognition
- emerging trends and/or issues.

Committee membership is drawn from representatives of different sectors delivering NCTJ qualifications along with industry professionals, the NCTJ principal examiner and members of the NCTJ senior management team. It is chaired by an independent representative appointed by the NCTJ main board of directors. The post is currently held by Mr Sean Dooley, former editor of *The Sentinel*, Stoke-on Trent.

This report is compiled to help explain the work of the committee, and to share some of the data it examines, reviews and debates, to ensure the reliability and transparency of NCTJ services.



# Qualification results analysis

## Certificate in Foundation Journalism 2016-17

During 2016-17, 17 units for the certificate in foundation journalism were submitted to the NCTJ for marking. This is compared to 461 units submitted in the previous year. One candidate successfully completed the qualification during the 2016-17 academic year.

## Diploma in Journalism 2016-17

During 2016-17, 8776 diploma examinations (excluding shorthand) have been sat (including resits). This figure is 490 sittings up from 2015-16. Overall achievement figures for the year September 2016 to July 2017 inclusive have been tabled below for each module of the Diploma in Journalism.

### Diploma in Journalism (exam sittings) results summary 2016-17

Exam	No. of sittings	Gold standard (A-C)		A-E pass rate	
Reporting	447	218	49%	438	98%
Essential Journalism	1123	572	51%	1096	98%
Newspaper Magazine Regulation Test	1291	970	75%	1256	97%
Public Affairs	1387	952	69%	1292	93%
Essential Media Law & Regulation	1494	955	64%	1364	91%
Court Reporting	1207	774	64%	1097	91%
Sports Journalism	251	178	71%	244	97%
Production Journalism	727	589	81%	720	99%
Business of Magazines	137	121	88%	137	100%
Videojournalism	316	239	76%	309	98%
Business & Finance	12	10	83%	12	100%
PR & Communications for Journalists	25	9	36%	22	88%
Broadcast Journalism – TV News	111	99	89%	111	100%
Broadcast Journalism – Radio News	130	98	75%	117	90%
Broadcast Journalism – Regulation	118	88	75%	116	98%
<b>Total no. of exam sittings</b>	<b>8776</b>				

With one exception, over half of the exams marked in each module have been awarded the industry gold standard of an A-C grade, with the overall majority achieving an E grade or above. In 2016-17, almost 67 per cent of candidates achieved the gold standard compared with 74 per cent in 2015-16. Ninety-five per cent of candidates achieved A-E grades in 2016-17 compared with 96 per cent in 2015-16.

### E-portfolios

In the academic year from 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017, 907 e-portfolios have been submitted for assessment. Of these submissions, 87 per cent were awarded the industry gold standard of an A-C grade.

### Shorthand exams

A total of 4014 shorthand examinations have been sat (including resits) and the achievement figures for the year have been tabled below.

Speed wpm	Number of sittings	Number of passes	Pass rate
60	1310	618	47%
70	92	49	53%
80	795	305	38%
90	49	27	55%
100	1708	410	24%
110	38	9	24%
120	22	10	45%
<b>Total no. of exam sittings</b>	<b>4014</b>	<b>1428</b>	<b>36%</b>

In 2016-17, 24 per cent achieved 100wpm, compared to 33 per cent the previous year. Overall, the percentage pass rate for students achieving a shorthand speed of 60wpm or over decreased by five percentage points from 41% to 36%.

## Level 3 Junior Journalist Apprenticeship 2016-17

By the end of the 2016-17 academic year, a total of 71 apprentices were registered with the NCTJ for the level 3 junior journalist apprenticeship standard at the following centres: Highbury College; City of Wolverhampton College; Press Association London; Lambeth College; Bauer Media; and Darlington College. 10 end-point assessments were completed in the 2016-17 academic year.

## National Qualification in Journalism 2016-17 (NQJ)

During 2016-17 169 candidates sat 594 NQJ examinations and assessments from November 2016 to July 2017 (including resits).

NQJ	Number of sittings	Number of passes	Pass rate
News interview	156	112	72%
News report	161	113	70%
Media law and practice	147	127	86%
Logbook	130	128	99%
<b>Total no. of exam sittings</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>81%</b>

Out of the 169 candidates who sat the NQJ in 2016-17, 69 per cent achieved the qualification, a decrease of one percentage point compared to 2015-16.





# Student council feedback

The purpose of the student council is to provide a forum for students to tell us what they think about the NCTJ training scheme and how it can be improved. It is a condition of accreditation that all NCTJ-accredited courses are represented on the student council. All council members are responsible for providing feedback to the NCTJ during their course and act as a direct link with students.

51 delegates from courses across the UK attended the NCTJ student council on 3 February 2017 at Sky. Andy Cairns, executive editor at Sky Sports News and chairman of the NCTJ accreditation board, chaired a panel of editors and alumni, answering questions from the delegates. Students also had a session asking senior managers at the NCTJ questions about all aspects of their courses before taking part in an exercise to present ideas for improvements. One representative from each of the eight groups presented answers to two questions. The headlines from their answers are set out in the table below. The six presenters from the day were invited to the next June board meeting of the NCTJ trustees.

What's good about NCTJ	What could be better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Stamp of approval, stand-out compared to other universities</li> <li>✓ Available for non-university students</li> <li>✓ Variety of people, ages, interests, experience, international</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More project-based work, less exams. More time in exams</li> <li>• Shorthand – emphasis 80/100wpm optional</li> <li>• NCTJ awards should be judged regionally</li> <li>• Availability of work placements and more NCTJ involvement</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Shorthand – good for jobs, helpful in all areas of the industry</li> <li>✓ Court/council visits – real life experience invaluable</li> <li>✓ E-Portfolio – good opportunity to showcase a range of stories and abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cost of resits</li> <li>• Feedback from exams should always cover how to improve for resits</li> <li>• Shorthand is essential should remain a compulsory part of gold standard</li> </ul>

What's good about NCTJ	What could be better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Exams keep up to date with industry requirements e.g. social media</li> <li>✓ Variety of the diploma – lots of options for modules</li> <li>✓ Challenging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication with students could be improved</li> <li>• Website – more access for students with a clearer website design</li> <li>• Help for students with special needs and updates when changes are made</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Good tutors</li> <li>✓ Good introduction to journalism</li> <li>✓ Shorthand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newspaper review – looking at house styles, varieties, niche publications, magazines</li> <li>• Would like a grade/score for the shorthand exams rather than pass/fail to see if we were close to grade boundaries</li> <li>• Work experience should be part of the course</li> <li>• Include international relations and understanding the press of other countries</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The quality and context of the diploma qualification</li> <li>✓ Essential Journalism and Cirrus</li> <li>✓ Willingness to listen to candidates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking students with NCTJ alumni (LinkedIn)</li> <li>• Better communication between the NCTJ and providers/providers and candidates</li> <li>• Tutor training on mental and physical health</li> <li>• Improve the website</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ E-Portfolio and industry experience which you can bring into work interviews</li> <li>✓ A good variety of useful and in-depth modules</li> <li>✓ Industry experienced tutors with good tips and advice</li> <li>✓ Good course timeframes – nicely spaced out but with the appropriate amount of pressure at the same time</li> <li>✓ Good diversity of students on course e.g. age range, different backgrounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCTJ to be more involved in student work placements</li> <li>• More prep time for shorthand exams</li> <li>• Is there a minimum number for students to be able to book resits?</li> <li>• Public affairs exam guide is very similar to the law exam</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The diploma allows you to develop practical skills</li> <li>✓ NCTJ is well recognised and nationally approved</li> <li>✓ Up-to-date curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More focus on digital</li> <li>• Website navigation needs improving</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Clear, concise communication that is well structured and organised</li> <li>✓ Distance learning makes it accessible to more students</li> <li>✓ Teachers are really committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep pace with new technologies e.g. new media etc.</li> <li>• More options for the elective modules on the diploma</li> </ul>



## Complaints

The NCTJ publishes its policy and procedure for dealing with complaints on its website.

Ten complaints have been received by the NCTJ in 2016-17, a decrease of five compared to 2015-16.

Two of the complaints made to the NCTJ in 2016-17 related to candidates' dissatisfaction with their centres. Three complaints related to the delivery of NCTJ examinations at individual centres. Of the remaining five – two complaints related to the content of examination reports, one related to qualification eligibility criteria, one related to the content of an NCTJ examination and one concerned a candidate who was unhappy with the response to an appeal request.

## Reasonable adjustments and special considerations

In 2016-17, 117 candidates had reasonable adjustments approved for NCTJ examinations and/or assessments. This is an increase of 35 on 2015-16 figures when 82 candidates had adjustments approved.

Any adjustment that the NCTJ approves must not alter the nature, rigour or integrity of the assessment. Any adjustment to assessments must not give the learner an unfair advantage or disadvantage over others.

In 2016-17, the greatest number of reasonable adjustment approvals made were for candidates with specific learning needs including autism/Asperger's syndrome and dyslexia, as well as mental health related conditions and anxiety.

## Appeals

The NCTJ publishes its policy and procedure for dealing with appeals on its website. The policy covers appeals of assessment results and appeals relating to other decisions made by the NCTJ.

A total of 16 appeals were formerly investigated during 2016-17, an increase of three on the 2015-16 figures.

### Appeals of assessment results

All of the appeals concerned individual candidate results. A total of 44 assessment results were reviewed on appeal and seven were upheld leading to an increase in the grade awarded.

### All other appeals

There was one appeal about a decision made by the NCTJ to null and void an exam which was not upheld.

## Exam incidents

Out of 14,405 exam sittings in 2016-17, there were a total of 42 incidents involving NCTJ exams. Of these 42 incidents, 10 related to exams held on the online Cirrus platform, where centres experienced minor problems running the safe exam browser software. Eight were related to minor incidents with exam papers/marketing guides and eight were due to centre based issues. Other incidents related to NCTJ results; exams delivery; candidate issues; candidate feedback reports; and content queries about NCTJ exams.





## Suspected malpractice and maladministration

The NCTJ publishes its policy and procedure for dealing with cases of suspected malpractice and/or maladministration by centres and candidates on its website.

During the academic year 2016-17, 13 suspected malpractice or maladministration cases were investigated. This is three more than the number reported/investigated in 2015-16.

Six of the cases involved alleged malpractice or maladministration by centres and seven were related to allegations of cheating by candidates. Sanctions were applied to six centres where malpractice and/or maladministration was confirmed. In three of these cases, investigations were carried out by the NCTJ and, where applicable, exams were declared null and void. The three other centres involved in cases were instructed to carry out investigations and to produce compulsory action plans to secure against further cases of malpractice/maladministration. Ongoing spot checks continue to monitor these centres, where applicable.

Cases of centre-based maladministration have been as a result of a breach of NCTJ procedures, mainly relating to exams invigilation and security of NCTJ assessments.

There were seven cases of candidates allegedly cheating and, following investigations, three candidates were prohibited from taking exams for six months. The other four cases proved to have insufficient evidence and were closed.

The NCTJ takes reports of suspected malpractice or maladministration extremely seriously. Each incident investigated is reviewed by the quality assurance and standards committee. Any sanctions applied in

accordance with the NCTJ sanctions policy, which is published on the NCTJ website, are also reviewed to ensure a fair and consistent approach is taken to each case.

## Conflicts of interest

Key stakeholders, and the individuals who work for them, are involved in a range of activities and have a range of functions with the NCTJ. The NCTJ recognises the need to prevent or minimise potential conflicts and identify and manage conflicts of interest to maintain the integrity of its qualifications and awarding organisation functions.

Our conflicts of interest policy aims to draw attention to the possibility of conflicts, minimise or prevent a conflict occurring and manage conflicts that have arisen. Our conflicts of interest policy can be viewed on our website via the following link:

<http://www.nctj.com/about-us/Policiesandprocedures>

## Annual self-evaluation

To ensure that our systems of internal control continue to be robust and effective, the NCTJ has in place an annual self-evaluation process which monitors our compliance with the regulators' general conditions of recognition. As part of this process the NCTJ commissions an independent consultant to conduct an annual audit of evidence of the NCTJ's compliance with the regulators' conditions of recognition, with oversight of the NCTJ risk register. The recommendations from this audit are logged in an internal self-evaluation action plan. This plan details any identified



recommendations/issues/risks, the action and evidence required to rectify them, who is responsible for the action and when the action must be completed by.

Actions identified in this plan in 2017 related to the following areas of the regulators' general conditions of recognition: governance, third parties and centres; general requirements for regulated qualifications; design and development of qualifications; and setting and delivering the assessment. This action plan is reviewed monthly by all NCTJ staff to ensure that actions are completed by the dates specified. Our next annual audit is due to take place in early 2018.

## Event notifications

As a recognised awarding organisation, the NCTJ must promptly notify the regulatory bodies when it has cause to believe that any event has occurred, or is likely to occur, which could have an adverse effect on learners. Examples of such events may include those where:

- there has been a loss or theft of, or a breach of confidentiality in, any assessment materials
- the awarding organisation believes that there has been an incident of malpractice or maladministration, which could invalidate the award of a qualification which it makes available
- the awarding organisation has issued incorrect results or certificates
- the awarding organisation is named as a party in any criminal or civil proceedings or is subjected

to a regulatory investigation or sanction by any professional, regulatory, or government body

The NCTJ made two notifications to Ofqual in 2016-17 of a potential adverse effect.

The first notification was in relation to Lambeth College. Ten candidates sat a Production Journalism exam on 15 December 2016. The NCTJ received notification from the centre that the exam had started late. No approval was sought from the NCTJ for the delay. It was subsequently confirmed that the security of the examination had been compromised during this delay, affecting the validity of the assessment results. The exams were declared null and void and Ofqual were notified of the event on 9 January 2017. Sanctions were placed against the centre for maladministration, in line with the NCTJ's sanctions policy and procedure.

The second notification concerned News Associates Manchester. Fifteen candidates sat a 100wpm shorthand exam on 14 July 2017. The NCTJ was notified by the marker of potential maladministration by centre staff which had compromised the integrity of the exam and the validity of the assessment results for two candidates. These two exams were declared null and void and Ofqual were notified of the event on 28 July 2017. Following a centre visit in August, maladministration was admitted by the centre. Sanctions were placed against the centre for maladministration, in line with the NCTJ's sanctions policy and procedure.



National Council for the  
Training of Journalists

### NCTJ

The New Granary, Station Road  
Newport, Saffron Walden  
Essex CB11 3PL

Tel: 01799 544014

Email: [info@nctj.com](mailto:info@nctj.com)

[www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com)