



# NCTJ QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18





# Chairman's overview

Though an accurate and concise record of the activities of the last year, this report is by necessity a scant appreciation of the continuing demands to maintain and enhance quality and standards and of the manner in which NCTJ staff have responded to the challenge of change and innovation.

It is a measure of their success that the NCTJ has not only kept pace with the effects on training needs of an industry in incessant upheaval, but in many instances has led the way in anticipating and meeting the skillset demands of tomorrow's journalists.

Even a cursory examination of the expanding range of specialist formats now open to students across broadcast, newspapers, magazines, and PR and Comms demonstrates a determination to keep pace with disparate and ever-developing media sector requirements. Higher level apprenticeships, international journalism and advanced digital options are just three further initiatives on the horizon. All are structured for the primary purpose of equipping students to the best level possible for their individual choices.

Behind new and updated exam options however, upholding standards in training and qualifications remains the core purpose overseen by this committee. Here, satisfaction and success are measured in student approval and forum feedback on the practical values of qualifications, the strength of the NCTJ kitemark and its focus on employability.

Percentage tables and volumes of reporting statistics, however impressive, cannot properly reflect the myriad of debate, care and effort that goes into dealing with the range of activity listed in this report with such effective results, which is why I feel it appropriate these comments are added as a footnote to an exceptional year.

**Sean Dooley**

Chairman, quality assurance and standards committee



# 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 2017-18

During 2017-18, 27 units for the Certificate in Foundation Journalism were submitted to the NCTJ for marking. This is compared to 17 units submitted in the previous year. Three candidates successfully completed the qualification during the 2017-18 academic year.

## Diploma in Journalism 2017-18

During 2017-18, 8805 diploma examinations (excluding shorthand) have been sat (including resits). This figure is 49 sittings up from 2016-17. Overall achievement figures for the year September 2017 to July 2018 inclusive have been tabled below for each module of the Diploma in Journalism.

### Diploma in Journalism (exam sittings) results summary 2017-18

Exam	Sittings	Gold Standard		A-E pass rate	
Essential Journalism	1436	784	55%	1403	98%
Newspaper Magazine Regulation Test	1468	962	66%	1397	95%
Public Affairs	1397	893	64%	1260	90%
Essential Media Law & Regulation	1491	1043	70%	1380	93%
Court Reporting	1222	865	71%	1127	92%
Sports Journalism	229	169	74%	228	99.6%
Production Journalism	697	542	78%	684	98%
Business of Magazines	129	110	85%	126	98%
Videojournalism	326	252	77%	317	97%
Business & Finance	13	12	92%	13	100%
PR & Communications for Journalists	0	0	0%	0	0%
Broadcast Journalism – TV News	124	91	73%	122	98%
Broadcast Journalism – Radio News	143	99	69%	126	88%
Broadcast Journalism – Regulation	130	113	87%	130	100%
<b>Total no. of exam sittings</b>	<b>8805</b>				

With the exception of the PR and communications module, 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 2017-18, almost 69 per cent of candidates achieved the gold standard compared with 67 per cent in 2016-17. Ninety-four per cent of candidates achieved A-E grades in 2017-18 compared with 95 per cent in 2016-17.

### E-portfolios

In the academic year from 1 September 2017 to 31 August 2018, 863 e-portfolios have been submitted for assessment. Of these submissions, 88 per cent were awarded the industry gold standard of an A-C grade.

### Shorthand exams

A total of 3726 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	1323	516	39%
70	106	31	29%
80	741	266	36%
100	1463	361	25%
110	64	16	25%
120	29	5	17%
<b>Total no. of exam sittings</b>	<b>3726</b>	<b>1195</b>	<b>32%</b>

In 2017-18, 25 per cent achieved 100wpm, compared to 24 per cent the previous year. Overall, the percentage pass rate for students achieving a shorthand speed of 60wpm or over decreased by four percentage points from 36 per cent to 32 per cent.

## Level 3 Junior Journalist Apprenticeship 2017-18

By the end of the 2017-18 academic year, a total of 105 apprentices were registered with the NCTJ for the level 3 junior journalist apprenticeship standard at the following centres: City of Wolverhampton College, Press Association London, Lambeth College, Bauer Media Academy, Darlington College, Highbury College, The Sheffield College and Let Me Play Ltd. Eleven end-point assessments were completed in the 2017-18 academic year.

## National Qualification in Journalism 2017-18 (NQJ)

During 2017-18 141 candidates sat 488 NQJ examinations and assessments from November 2017 to July 2018 (including resits).

NQJ	Number of sittings	Number of passes	Pass rate
News interview	134	93	69%
News report	141	89	63%
Media law and practice	113	88	78%
Logbook	100	100	100%
<b>Total no. of exam sittings</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>76%</b>

Out of the 141 candidates who sat the NQJ in 2017-18, 63 per cent achieved the qualification, a decrease of six percentage points compared to 2016-17.



## Group discussions and feedback

### The NCTJ

- What is good about the NCTJ?
- What do you think could be better?

### Reporting disaster

- Do you receive any training in this area?
- If not, what training do you think you need for reporting disasters?

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Student Council 2018

### WHAT IS GOOD ABOUT THE NCTJ?

Teachers awarded  
Tutors have experience - still active in industry  
Well recognised in the industry - degrees don't make you employable!  
Vocational, covers many aspects

### WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

ES Marking - borderline passes being marked down for non-applicable points, e.g. name spelling - can't get past band 2 - error!  
Unrealistic, dull subjects, fantasy places.  
Portfolio - names & addresses  
Websites difficult to navigate  
Little help for people with disabilities in standard - CP, dyslexia/praxis  
Very difficult to get diversity funding - some feedback about the cost of upfront fees & difficulty of working at the same time

### Terrorism & Briarcliff

- Given time off to report P. Green/Manchester  
- Not much sensitivity training (last touch?)  
- Stand it - police confirmation: what to report on

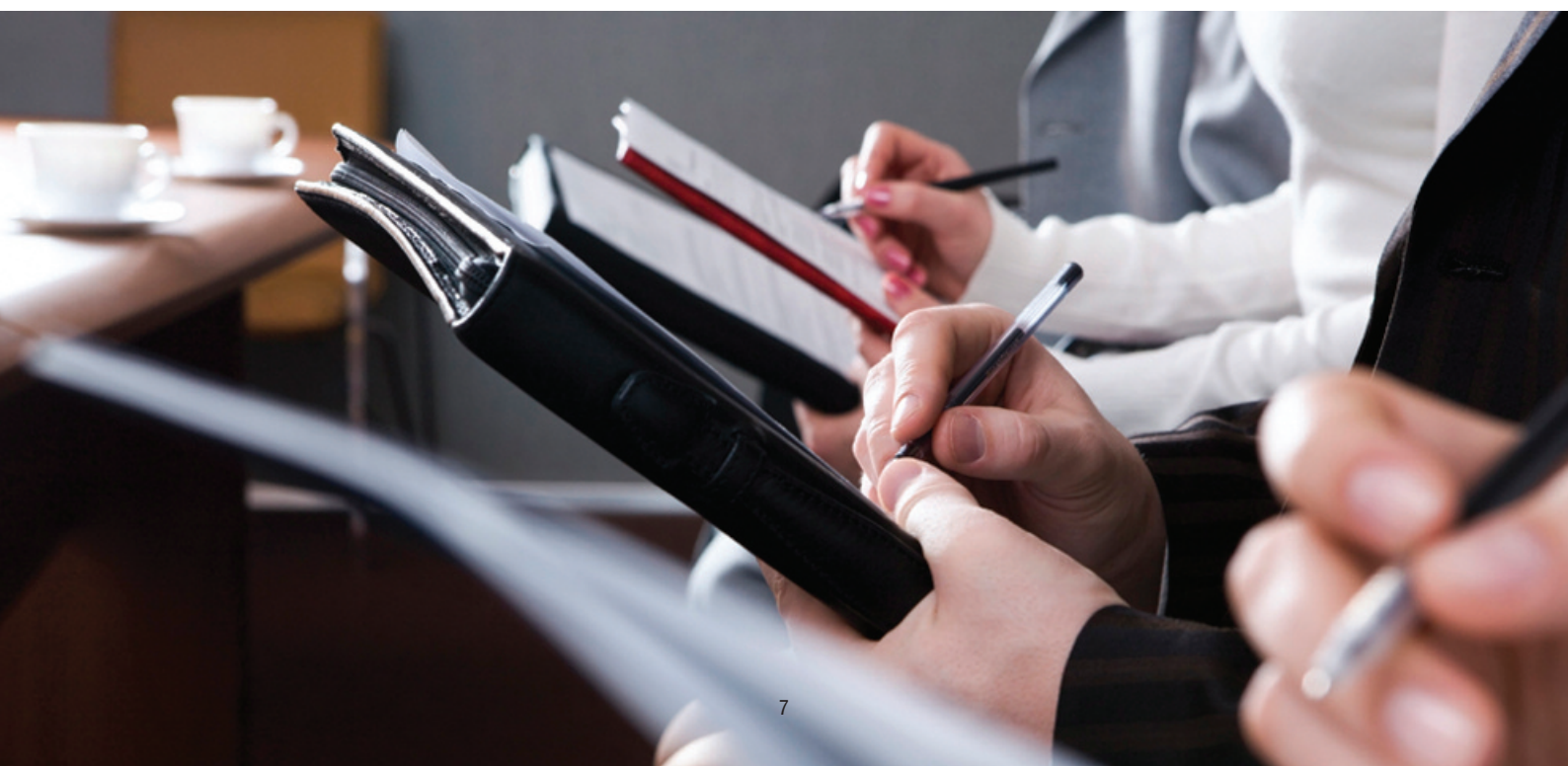
## Student council feedback

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.

Forty-five student reps from courses across the UK attended the NCTJ student council event on 2 February 2018 at the BBC Academy in Birmingham. Laura Adams, editorial director at Archant London, Herts and Cambs, chaired a panel of editors and alumni, answering questions from the students. Students also had a session asking senior staff and the principal examiner at the NCTJ questions about the diploma and all aspects of their courses before taking part in an exercise to discuss the NCTJ and present ideas for improvements. One representative from each of the four groups presented their answers to the forum. The headlines from their answers are set out in the table on page 6.



What's good about the NCTJ	What could be better about the NCTJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A stepping stone to employment in the industry</li> <li>✓ NCTJ accredits selected courses</li> <li>✓ Gold standard</li> <li>✓ Gives regulation and structure to courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• e-portfolio criteria could be less specific</li> <li>• More NCTJ and centre collaboration and contact</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Focuses on employability</li> <li>✓ Good reputation</li> <li>✓ Recognised internationally</li> <li>✓ NCTJ exams prepare you for 'real world' journalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More practical skills should be assessed</li> <li>• Scenarios in shorthand recordings should be more realistic</li> <li>• The language used in the e-portfolio conditions could be more clear</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A tough qualification but well respected and deserved</li> <li>✓ Good tutors with relevant experience</li> <li>✓ Well recognised in the industry</li> <li>✓ The diploma is a vocational qualification that covers different aspects of journalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scenarios in the EJ exam could be more realistic</li> <li>• Not all students were aware of the e-portfolio mandatory conditions whilst preparing for their submissions</li> <li>• Website is difficult to navigate</li> <li>• More help for people with disabilities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The diploma is a realistic and practical qualification that prepares you for the industry</li> <li>✓ Good course delivery</li> <li>✓ Passionate tutors</li> <li>✓ A respected qualification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More digital skills – e.g. would like to cover SEO/social media in more detail</li> <li>• More flexibility</li> </ul>



# Complaints

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

Twelve complaints were received by the NCTJ in 2017-18, an increase of two compared to 2016-17.

Eight of the complaints made to the NCTJ in 2017-18 related to candidates' dissatisfaction with their centres. Two complaints related to the delivery of NCTJ examinations at individual centres. Of the remaining two complaints – one related to examination feedback and one concerned a candidate who was unhappy with an assessment result.

In November 2017, Ofqual reported a complaint from an NCTJ candidate regarding a decision taken by the NCTJ to null and void an exam. The complaint was investigated by Ofqual and the regulator upheld the NCTJ's decision and rejected the candidate's claims. The investigating officer identified four compliance issues, which were disputed by the NCTJ, and referred them to Ofqual's standards team. No regulatory action was taken.

# Reasonable adjustments and special considerations

In 2017-18, 116 candidates had reasonable adjustments approved for NCTJ examinations and/or assessments. This is a decrease of one candidate on 2016-17 figures when 117 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 2017-18, the greatest number of reasonable adjustment approvals made were for candidates with dyslexia and specific learning needs, 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 11 appeals were formerly investigated during 2017-18, a decrease of five on the 2016-17 figures.

## Appeals of assessment results

Eight of the appeals investigated during 2017-18 concerned individual candidate results. A total of 14 assessment results were reviewed on appeal and three were upheld leading to an increase in the grade awarded.

## All other appeals

There were two section B appeals submitted during 2017-18 – one against a decision to disqualify a candidate from an exam which was successful, and one against an NCTJ complaint response which was not upheld. There was one stage 2 appeal submitted in 2017-18 against the decision to null and void an exam which was not upheld.

# Exam incidents

Out of 13,683 exam sittings in 2017-18, there were a total of 35 incidents involving NCTJ exams. Of these 35 incidents, eight related to exams held on the online Cirrus platform, where centres experienced technical problems running the exam in the secure browser software, four related to minor incidents with exam papers and four were due to centre based issues. Other incidents related to NCTJ results and certificates; exams delivery; and candidate issues.

# Spot checks

In 2017-18 there were 73 exam spot checks carried out at accredited centres. Six centres received sanctions as a result of a failed spot check owing to a breach in NCTJ examination procedures. Three centres received a pass with conditions based on minor issues identified by the spot checker. The remaining centres all passed with no issues highlighted by the checker. All centres that failed a spot check were successfully revisited by the end of July 2018.





## 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 2017-18, eight suspected malpractice or maladministration cases were investigated. This is five less than the number reported/investigated in 2016-17.

Four of the cases involved alleged malpractice or maladministration by centres and four were related to allegations of cheating by candidates. Sanctions were applied to five centres where malpractice and/or maladministration was confirmed. In all cases, investigations were carried out by the NCTJ and, where applicable, exams were declared null and void. Where an incident of candidate malpractice occurred, these centres were instructed to carry out an initial investigation into the incident and to provide an investigation report to the NCTJ to assist with our findings. Ongoing spot checks continue to monitor centres where malpractice and/or maladministration was confirmed, where applicable.

Cases of centre-based maladministration have been as a result of a breach of NCTJ procedures, mainly relating to exam invigilation and security arrangements for submitting exam scripts.

There were four cases of candidates allegedly cheating and, following investigations, three candidates were prohibited from taking exams for a period of six months or longer. The fourth case proved to have insufficient evidence and was 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 2018 related to the following areas of the regulators' general conditions of recognition: centre monitoring; exam procedures and arrangements; registration and certification; and apprenticeship provision and arrangements. 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 2019.

## 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 no notifications to Ofqual in 2017-18 of a potential adverse effect.

## External audits

In November 2017, NCTJ was included in Ofqual's standard audit of 20 awarding organisations in relation to managing and mitigating centre-based malpractice and maladministration. There were some areas for improvement but, overall, the findings were positive and there was evidence of strong performance.

Open Awards conducted a standard audit of NCTJ policies and procedures for apprenticeship end-point assessments (EPAs) in March 2018. The report identified particular strengths in the areas of gateway processes and procedures, self-evaluation and staff resources, and recommended some improvements to EPA policies and procedures.



National Council for the  
Training of Journalists

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