



NCTJ QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19



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
- compliance with EQA providers for end-point assessments
- 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 2018-19

During 2018-19, 45 candidates submitted unit assessments to the NCTJ for marking. This equates to 330 unit assessments. This is compared to 27 candidates who submitted assessments in the previous year. 26 candidates successfully completed the qualification during the 2018-19 academic year.

Diploma in Journalism 2018-19

During 2018-19, 8192 diploma examinations (excluding shorthand) have been sat (including resits). This figure is 613 sittings down from 2017-18. Overall achievement figures for the year September 2018 to July 2019 inclusive have been tabled below for each module of the Diploma in Journalism.

Diploma in Journalism (exam sittings) results summary 2018-19

Exam	Sittings	Gold Standard	A-E pass rate
Essential Journalism	1439	774	54%
Newspaper Magazine Regulation Test	1330	986	74%
Public Affairs	1264	808	64%
Essential Media Law & Regulation	1343	868	65%
Court Reporting	1131	745	66%
Sports Journalism	220	154	70%
Production Journalism	716	509	71%
Business of Magazines	100	84	84%
Videojournalism	299	215	72%
Business & Finance	8	7	88%
PR & Communications for Journalists	25	15	60%
Intro to PR for Journalists	32	12	38%
Practical Magazine Journalism	32	24	75%
Broadcast Journalism – TV News	76	65	86%
Broadcast Journalism – Radio News	73	62	85%
Broadcast Journalism – Regulation	104	82	79%
Total no. of exam sittings	8192		

With the exception of the introduction to PR for journalists 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 2018-19, 66 per cent of candidates achieved the gold standard compared with 69 per cent in 2017-18. Ninety-four per cent of candidates achieved A-E grades in 2018-19, the same as in 2017-18.

E-portfolios

In the academic year from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019, 931 e-portfolios have been submitted for assessment. Of these submissions, 91 per cent were awarded the industry gold standard of an A-C grade.

Shorthand exams

A total of 3664 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	1393	527	38%
70	67	24	36%
80	721	290	40%
100	1378	330	24%
110	79	19	24%
120	26	4	15%
Total no. of exam sittings	3664	1194	33%

In 2018-19, 24 per cent achieved 100wpm, compared to 25 per cent the previous year. Overall, the percentage pass rate for students achieving a shorthand speed of 60wpm or over increased by one percentage point from 32 per cent to 33 per cent.

Level 3 Junior Journalist Apprenticeship 2018-19

In 2018-19, a total of 68 apprentices were registered with the NCTJ for the level 3 junior journalist apprenticeship standard at the following centres: Highbury College, Press Association London, News Associates London, Let Me Play Ltd., Bauer Media Academy, Darlington College, City of Wolverhampton College, Sheffield College, Learning and Development Bureau, and The Thomson Foundation. 33 end-point assessments were completed in the 2018-19 academic year.

National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) 2018-19

During 2018-19 99 candidates sat 302 NQJ examinations and assessments from November 2018 to July 2019 (including resits).

NQJ	Number of sittings	Number of passes	Pass rate
News interview	55	37	67%
News report	60	41	68%
Big news story	38	30	79%
Media law	82	62	76%
e-Logbook	67	66	99%
Total no. of exam sittings	302	236	78%

Out of the 99 candidates who sat the NQJ in 2018-19, 66 per cent achieved the qualification, an increase of three percentage points compared to 2017-18.

Group discussions and feedback

The NCTJ

- What is good about the course?
- What do you think could be improved?

Your journalism career

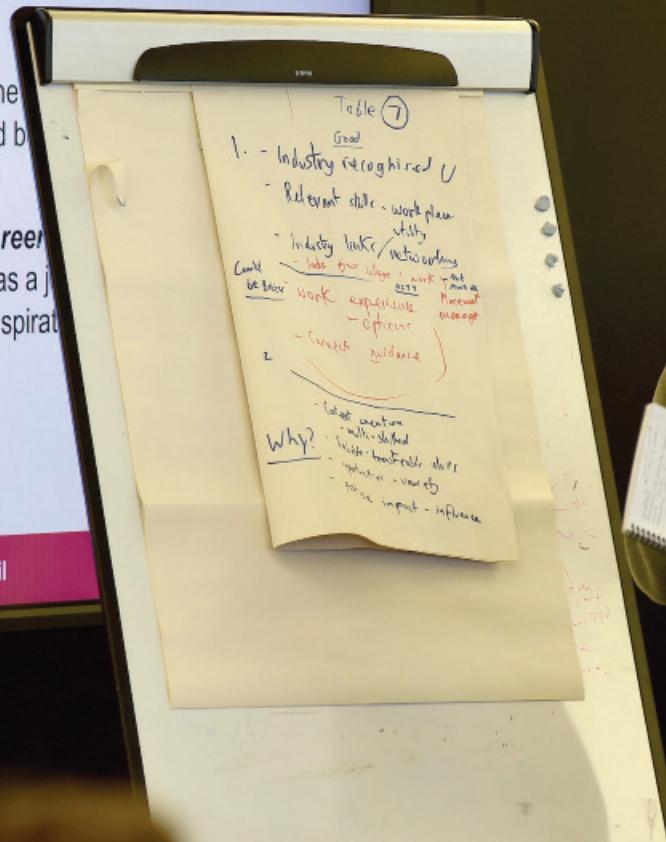
- Why did you want to train as a journalist?
- What are your career aspirations?

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#NCTJstudentcouncil



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.

Fifty-two student representatives from courses across the UK attended the NCTJ Student Council on 8 February 2019 at the BBC Media City in Manchester. Chas Watkin, executive editor, BBC Radio 4, 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 seven 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"> ✓ Innovative ✓ A high standard, firm but fair, no matter what the course ✓ NCTJ-accredited courses give you a valuable skillset which is important for the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prices for exam resits could be lower • More open book exams • Textbooks more targeted and specific to exams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Digital focused, catering for multimedia journalists ✓ A good gateway to jobs ✓ Well recognised in the industry ✓ Rewarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The e-portfolio could allow students to submit longer form journalism pieces such as video • Access to more sample exams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides practical experience which can be used in the industry ✓ Prepares students for employment ✓ The exams include real and current scenarios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More clarity over elective modules • More industry communication between NCTJ and centres • More careers information for students on accredited courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Recognised industry-wide ✓ A route into a job in a restricted industry ✓ Responds to trends in the industry, including data journalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could engage more with students • More flexible exam dates for part-time students • Would like more careers information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The diploma qualification has prestige, gives you an edge and the intense training shows your commitment ✓ Opportunities for networking ✓ A good selection of a variety of modules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer support on reasonable adjustments • Ensure answer options for the regulation test are clear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Very thorough training ✓ The flexibility of choosing module options ✓ Vocational and industry relevant ✓ No two days are ever the same 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a module on touch typing • Fictional towns in exams should be real places
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ High standards and industry-led ✓ Key to entering the journalism profession ✓ Industry relevant ✓ Industry links and networking opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some regions have less industry connections, the NCTJ could help more with this • More careers guidance and support, for example careers days and events

Complaints

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

Nine complaints were received by the NCTJ in 2018-19, a decrease of three compared to 2017-18.

One of the complaints made to the NCTJ in 2018-19 related to a candidate's dissatisfaction with their centre. Five complaints related to the delivery of NCTJ examinations at individual centres. Of the remaining three complaints – two related to the NCTJ distance learning course and one concerned a complaint about a community reporter from a rival publication.

There were no complaints reported by Ofqual about the NCTJ in 2018-19.

Reasonable adjustments and special considerations

In 2018-19, 124 candidates had reasonable adjustments approved for NCTJ examinations and/or assessments. This is an increase of eight candidates on 2017-18 figures when 116 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 2018-19, the greatest number of reasonable adjustment approvals made were for candidates with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties, ADHD, Asperger's syndrome and mental health related conditions such as anxiety and depression.

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 14 appeals were formerly investigated during 2018-19, an increase of three on the 2017-18 figures.

Appeals of assessment results

Thirteen of the appeals investigated during 2018-19 concerned individual candidate results. A total of 14 assessment results were reviewed on appeal and six were upheld leading to an increase in the grade awarded.

All other appeals

There were no section B or stage 2 appeals submitted to the NCTJ during 2018-19.

Exam incidents

Out of 13,537 assessments sat in 2018-19, there were a total of 23 incidents involving NCTJ exams. Of these 23 incidents, seven related to technical issues with exams held on the online Cirrus platform, six related to minor incidents with exam papers and three related to centre issues with exams delivery. Other incidents related to NCTJ results and certificates, and centre issues.

Spot checks

In the 2018-19 academic year, there were 50 exam spot checks carried out at accredited centres. One centre failed a spot check owing to a breach in NCTJ examination procedures. Five 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 2018-19, five suspected malpractice or maladministration cases were investigated. This is three less than the number reported/investigated in 2017-18.

Two of the cases involved alleged malpractice or maladministration by centres and three were related to allegations of malpractice against candidates. Sanctions were applied to three 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 the set-up of NCTJ exams.

There were three cases of candidates allegedly cheating (involving a total of four candidates) and, following investigations, two candidates were prohibited from taking exams for a period of six months or longer. One 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 2019 related to the following areas of the regulators' general conditions of recognition: governance; arrangements with third parties and centres; accessibility, 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 2020.

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 2018-19 of a potential adverse effect.

Chairman's overview

The core of this annual report is, by necessity, an exhaustive register of activity. Yet tabulated statistics barely tell the story of another outstanding year of change and challenge for quality and standards.

Rigour and administrative expertise provide the bedrock for excellence in any service provision and, despite the constraints of a small executive, this year marks further advances in standards of delivery across almost all areas, including complaints, appeals, centre monitoring and exam compliance.

These results are particularly satisfying as they are set against a background of increased intensity in regulatory oversight. They also underscore the accruing benefits of a widening programme of self-evaluation and strategic risk assessment to an operation determined to cater for the incessant pace of change within journalism and its effect on student choice.

Our fluctuating media landscape now drives the need to reappraise and refine existing qualifications on an ever-shortening time cycle, and innovation has again been at the forefront of service. The landmark NQJ for news journalists was delivered in July with stimulating feedback. Other initiatives include the piloting of elective options on data and digital

audience journalism and the development of an NQJ for community journalists.

The commitment to promote diversity and inclusion continues to challenge staff as they meet and monitor the Council pledge of fair and equitable treatment of candidates. Processes are resource intensive and wide ranging, from case-by-case scrutiny for reasonable adjustments to the oversight of accredited centres' own delivery of equal opportunities. All need continual assessment to ensure impartiality in age, gender, ethnic origin or particular needs.

Across subjects of compliance, malpractice, Ofqual assurance criteria or any area of operation, this report can reflect only a taste of the merit of the year's work. Ultimately the best indication of achievement rests with the customer base. And, as measured by the Student Council feedback, it is clear the crypto currency known as the NCTJ kitemark has once again shown a healthy rise in value.

Sean Dooley

Chairman, quality assurance and standards committee



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