

Coronavirus and the NCTJ: FAQs for centres

Questions relating to exams:

Will NCTJ exams be substituted for another type of assessment?

The NCTJ will not apply special considerations permitting the awarding of predicted grades or mock assessments, the substitution of exams for another type of assessment, or any adjustment to marking standards. This is to ensure vocational and employer requirements are met, to ensure assessments are fair across all candidates, to maintain the integrity of NCTJ qualifications, and to uphold the industry standard in relation to current journalism practice.

The NCTJ believe it is fairer to adapt or reschedule exams as soon as possible rather than estimating grades based on previous performance or asking educators and trainers to try to make judgments about their candidates' professional skills and competence.

I need to defer a shorthand exam sitting. How do I do this?

Because shorthand exams are not invoiced until after they take place, centres just need to inform the NCTJ via email if they need to cancel a booked shorthand exam. The exam does not need to be deferred. Once centres know the new exam date they want to book for, they should book the new exam date following the NCTJ's shorthand exam booking procedures.

I need to defer a Diploma in Journalism exam (not shorthand). How do I do this?

To request a deferral for diploma exams (not shorthand), centres need to request a special consideration. This is done by completing an NCTJ special consideration/deferral request form and returning it to a member of the NCTJ exams team. Please note that deferred exams must be re-booked via the booking form on the NCTJ website, they will not be re-booked automatically as part of the deferral.

If a centre is deferring an exam for a whole cohort, would it be necessary for each individual candidate to submit a special consideration request form?

No, in these circumstances the NCTJ will accept one special consideration/deferral request form for the group, as long as the candidates are on the same course. The name of the course and the name of the individual candidates must be clearly detailed on the form. The NCTJ cannot accept one form for candidates on different courses – these must be submitted on separate deferral forms. Please note that deferred exams must be re-booked via the booking form on the NCTJ website, they will not be re-booked automatically as part of the deferral.

If an individual candidate is requesting a special consideration as a result of Covid-19, what happens if they don't have access to supporting evidence?

For individual requests from students as a result of Covid-19, the NCTJ will be flexible on type of supporting evidence submitted with the special consideration request form. If candidates have Covid symptoms and/or are self-isolating, the NCTJ accepts it may not be possible to submit a doctor's note as supporting evidence. In these instances centres will need to outline the candidate's individual circumstances on the request form and can submit a supporting statement from the centre as supporting evidence, in place of a doctor's note.

What happens if a centre cannot deliver the diploma exams in-centre?

The option of remote exams will continue to be available for all diploma exams taking place in the 2021-22 academic year so candidates have the opportunity to sit their exams securely at home. This will be for all diploma subjects, including shorthand.

Exams sat online in Cirrus (including the shorthand transcription) will be monitored remotely by secure proctoring technology, called Proctorio. Exams sat outside of Cirrus (including the shorthand dictation) will be delivered remotely using Zoom. Documentation for remote exam sittings, including invigilation notes, candidate procedures/instructions and FAQs, are available on the NCTJ's website in tutor, admin contact and student resources.

Will there be any leeway on gold standard as regards shorthand – e.g. accepting 60wpm for those students who have gold standard in all other areas?

To protect the integrity of the diploma qualification and the validity of the assessment, the NCTJ will not be making any adjustments to marking standards.

Questions relating to the e-portfolio:

Are the coronavirus temporary arrangements for the e-portfolio still available?

The NCTJ has issued temporary adaptations to the essential journalism e-portfolio, photography portfolio and video/TV coursework assessments, which are designed to ensure candidates who continue to be affected by pandemic are not unfairly disadvantaged. These adaptations will continue to be available in 2021-22, but on a case by case basis only. If candidates wish to make use of these temporary adaptations, they must request a special consideration directly with the NCTJ.

The temporary adaptations are published on the NCTJ website in tutor and student resources.

What happens if candidates cannot complete the work experience element of the e-portfolio?

The 10 days' work experience is a recommendation for the e-portfolio and is not mandatory, so this can be relaxed for any students who have had work experience placements cancelled.

Questions relating to end-point assessments:

Will the junior/senior journalist end-point assessment project be substituted for another type of assessment?

Assessment methods as stated in the assessment plan cannot be substituted for another assessment method. Authority to change an assessment method(s) remains with IFATE.

The end-point assessments for the junior and senior journalist apprenticeship standards can be delivered remotely. The qualities and behaviours assessment for junior journalists can be conducted via Skype, FaceTime or similar, or via phone. Training providers/employers do not need to request a special consideration for this.

Guidance on what evidence is admissible for end-point assessment journalism projects may be adapted to ensure no apprentices are unfairly disadvantaged – please contact the NCTJ directly for more details.

If the completion of an end-point assessment journalism project is disrupted as a result of the pandemic, the NCTJ will follow any guidance and temporary flexibilities issued by the ESFA to allow the end-point assessment to be rescheduled and to ensure certification timeframes are met.

The arrangements relating to carrying out interviews and video outlined in the NCTJ's temporary arrangements for the e-portfolio and videojournalism coursework will apply to end-point assessment journalism projects. However, apprentices must ensure their journalism project continues to meet all the knowledge, skills and behaviours listed in the relevant apprenticeship standard.

Other questions:

Will there be any impact on administration/accreditation deadlines?

The NCTJ is happy to be flexible on non-urgent administrative deadlines related to accreditation, including annual returns and self-assessment reviews. Please ensure you inform our accreditation manager that there will be a delay and why. Centres must continue to notify the NCTJ of any significant events as they occur and seek approval for changes to accredited courses in advance.

How long can NCTJ course end dates be extended for?

Please discuss the extensions to course end dates directly with the NCTJ. We will consider extensions that are reasonable in the circumstances and at the time of the request, to mitigate adverse effects on candidates.

For any third/final year students who are due to graduate from their course, but still have some NCTJ diploma modules/exams to complete, can they return to the centre to complete those missing elements?

Yes. Please encourage your students to sit outstanding exams at the earliest opportunity and stress the importance of completing the Diploma in Journalism qualification. Centres are reminded that any candidates who have sat assessments on the Level 3 Diploma in Journalism will have until 30 September 2022 to complete the qualification at this level, now that it has moved up to Level 5. Assessments are not transferable from the Level 3 to the Level 5 qualification.

Do all their elements have to be completed by a certain time frame – or can they just pick up the missing elements of their Diploma – at any point in the future – via the NCTJ site etc.?

Your students should complete their diploma assessments before the course end date and, in line with our accreditation standards, you should ensure they have the opportunity and are encouraged to complete the qualification. Centres are reminded that any candidates who have sat assessments on the Level 3 Diploma in Journalism will have until 30 September 2023 to complete the qualification at this level, now that it has moved up to Level 5. Assessments are not transferable from the Level 3 to the Level 5 qualification.