

NCTJ Contingency Policy for Qualifications and Apprenticeships

Introduction

The NCTJ is committed to ensuring the safety of its stakeholders and to upholding the interests of its centres and candidates and the integrity of its exams and assessments. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the NCTJ has put this contingency policy in place.

This policy outlines our approach to assessment delivery during this unprecedented time in relation to our qualifications and end-point assessments, and the steps the NCTJ is taking to try to mitigate any adverse effect, in relation to our qualifications, arising from the disruption to our exams and assessments. This policy should be read in conjunction with the most up-to-date version of the NCTJ's coronavirus contingency plan, which can be found [here](#).

This policy is aimed for use by NCTJ staff to ensure our contingency arrangements for assessment delivery during coronavirus restrictions are fair, consistent and do not undermine the reliability and validity of assessment results.

Policy overview

The NCTJ has determined the most suitable delivery approach for each of our qualifications which will protect the integrity of our assessments and the reliability and validity of the assessment results. Alongside this, we have reviewed each of our qualifications against the directives issued during the pandemic by our regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Diploma in Journalism / National Qualification in Journalism

The NCTJ's Diploma in Journalism and National Qualification in Journalism are vocationally-related qualifications designed to assess occupational competence in journalism and the media. Candidates achieving these qualifications will progress to employment in the journalism and/or media sector, either as an entry-level journalist (Diploma in Journalism) or as a senior journalist (National Qualification in Journalism). Both qualifications cover the core skills and specialist skills required by employers which are assessed to a national industry standard. The Diploma in Journalism is the mandated gateway qualification for the junior journalist apprenticeship, and the National Qualification in Journalism is the mandated qualification in the senior journalist apprenticeship.

In line with the guidance issued by our regulators, the NCTJ will be following a policy of adaptation for the assessments within the diploma and NQJ qualifications. Adaptation may include a change to how assessments are conducted and invigilated, and how the result is generated from the evidence available. It does not involve the substitution of assessments. However, the NCTJ is concerned that candidates should not be put at an advantage or disadvantage over others in its qualifications, so adaptations will only be made where they do not affect the integrity of our qualifications or the reliability and validity of the assessment results. Where adaptation is not suitable, the NCTJ will follow the option to delay and will work with centres and candidates to try to mitigate any adverse effects arising from this disruption.

Because the diploma and NQJ are designed to assess occupational competence, the NCTJ will not follow a policy of reducing the content of the qualifications or their assessments, and will not follow a policy of estimating grades for these qualifications. This includes accepting exemptions, equivalences or recognised prior learning, or applying special considerations

permitting the awarding of predicted grades or grades from mock assessments. 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.

Certificate in Foundation Journalism

The NCTJ's Certificate in Foundation Journalism provides an introduction to journalism skills and may be used as a first step for candidates considering a career in journalism or by those wishing to develop their journalistic skills for a specific purpose. It does not assess occupational competence, however adaptation to the method of assessment delivery is not necessary for this qualification because the assessment methods can be delivered remotely. Guidance on what evidence is admissible for the assessments may be adjusted if necessary.

Qualification in Practical International Journalism

The NCTJ's Qualification in Practical International Journalism covers the core elements of operating as a journalist in an international arena. It is a vocationally-related qualification. Adaptation to the method of assessment delivery is not necessary for this qualification because the assessment (an e-portfolio of evidence) can be delivered remotely. Guidance on what evidence is admissible for the portfolio may be adjusted if necessary.

Diploma in Magazine Journalism

The NCTJ's Diploma in Magazine Journalism is a bespoke qualification designed to provide professional development for magazine journalists. It is delivered via in-house training with one employer. The NCTJ will follow the option of adaptation or delay for this qualification, in consultation with the employer.

Certificate in Professional Sports Journalism

The NCTJ's Certificate in Professional Sports Journalism is a bespoke qualification designed to provide professional development for sports journalists. It is delivered via in-house training with one employer. The NCTJ will follow the option of adaptation or delay for this qualification, in consultation with the employer.

Junior and Senior Journalist Apprenticeship end-point assessments

For end-point assessments, the NCTJ will follow the guidance and temporary flexibilities issued by IfATE and the ESFA in response to the coronavirus pandemic, whilst these remain in place. The end-point assessments for these standards can be conducted remotely. Guidance on what evidence is admissible for end-point assessment journalism projects may be adapted if necessary.

Assessment methods, as stated in the assessment plan, cannot be substituted for another assessment method. This is to ensure the end-point assessment still meets the original intent as set out in the assessment plan. Authority to change an assessment method(s) remains with IfATE.

Mitigating adverse effects

The NCTJ is taking all reasonable steps to try to mitigate any adverse effect, in relation to our qualifications, arising from any disruption to our exams and assessments. When deciding on the steps to take the NCTJ has considered:

- The assessment windows for NCTJ exams – exams for the diploma run from November to July, and for the NQJ three times a year in November, March and July
- The different centre types we support, which include HE, FE, independent commercial centres and approved exam centres
- The different learner types we support, which include candidates on accredited courses, apprentices, distance learners and candidates on in-house training schemes

The steps the NCTJ is taking include:

- Additional exam dates will be considered for the Diploma in Journalism and NQJ, where appropriate
- Coordinating reciprocal arrangements between centres to support the delivery of NCTJ exams
- Issuing credit certificates free of charge on request, so candidates who do not achieve the full qualification can have an official record of their achievement
- To mitigate the delay on exams delivery for centres operating under coronavirus restrictions, the NCTJ is offering remote exam sittings in 2021-22, using secure proctoring technology and other online platforms

NCTJ assessments will take place under any restrictions imposed by the pandemic and results are being published as normal. The NCTJ may consider accelerating results, where required and if it is achievable without compromising their reliability and validity, if this is required for individual learners. We will consider such requests on a case by case basis.

The NCTJ considers that our approach to assessment delivery during the coronavirus pandemic is only likely to cause an adverse effect on candidates if they are prevented from achieving their NCTJ qualification by their course end date. In these circumstances we will follow the steps outlined in our adverse effects policy and promptly notify our regulator(s), identifying any corrective actions already taken or planned by us to mitigate the adverse effect.

Review arrangements

The coronavirus pandemic is an evolving situation and this contingency policy will be kept under continuous review. It will be revised as and when necessary in response to customer and candidate feedback, changes in our practices, actions from the regulatory authorities or external agencies or changes in legislation.