

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

SEPTEMBER 2022



NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

This examiners' report covers the sittings of the Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) in 2021-22 (November 2021, March 2022 and July 2022).

Across the 2021-22 academic year, a total of 91 candidates sat the exams for the NQJ. Of these 91 candidates, 86 took the full qualification and five sat one or more of the assessments. Over the three sittings, a total of 47 candidates achieved the qualification, a pass rate of 55 per cent.

The next examiners' report is due to be published in September 2023 and will cover the NQJ sittings in November 2022, March 2023 and July 2023.

AWARD WINNERS 2021-22

The award winners listed below have been selected from the candidates who sat the NQJ in November 2021, March 2022 and July 2022.



MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE AWARD, SPONSORED BY REVIEWED & CLEARED

Sarah Hussain, *Eastern Daily Press*

Sarah Hussain (89%). Sarah produced a superb paper for the November examination, only dropping 17 marks overall. There were no weaknesses in her answers, which were clear and concise, showing not only impressive knowledge but also how to apply it to the scenarios in the questions. In the last section, Sarah identified the relevant clauses and made a sound decision relating to the public interest about covering a Covid-19 outbreak at a primary school. She produced a clear plan of action on how this should be reported in a way that respected privacy. Congratulations Sarah.



PRACTICAL JOURNALISM SKILLS AWARD, SPONSORED BY ESSO

Amy Austin, *Financial Times*

Amy Austin (75%). Amy's feature package for the Specialist Brand Publishing pathway was an excellent example of how to incorporate all the core journalism values as well as utilising new platform trends. Amy's editor summed up the feeling of the NCTJ markers too: "The story is engaging and well put together and delivers what it set out to do. It needed minimal editing and provided valuable additional content in the form of a podcast." She went on to say that it was 'great value to our readers'. Amy is clearly a hit with her brand's audience and a deserving recipient.



LOGBOOK AWARD, SPONSORED BY NEWSQUEST

Lewis Smith, *Wales Online*

Lewis Smith (86%). Markers had no issue in nominating this submission as the NQJ logbook award winner. Written in both an engaging but easy to read style, the logbook itself was well crafted and hit all key criteria. Key tasks which proved most impressive were the use of social media, the trainee's choice and also the reflective statement, all of which secured just short of maximum marks. With a very strong writing style which clearly grabbed the reader's attention from the outset, Lewis has proved to be a worthy winner.

The candidates listed below gained the National Qualification in Journalism in 2021-22:

Catriona Aitken	<i>Andover Advertiser</i>	Catherine Kennedy	<i>New Civil Engineer</i>
Danielle Andrews	<i>Sheffield Star</i>	Jade Kidd	<i>Baylis Media</i>
Amy Austin	<i>Financial Times</i>	Lisa Letcher	<i>Cornwall Live</i>
Abigail Beaney	<i>The Bolton News</i>	Maisie Lillywhite	<i>Bristol Live</i>
Elizabeth Birt	<i>South Wales Argus</i>	Emma Loffhagen	<i>Evening Standard</i>
Rosie Boon	<i>Peterborough Evening Telegraph</i>	Deborah Luxon	<i>Cambridge News</i>
Caislin Boyle	<i>Newham Recorder</i>	Logan MacLeod	<i>Northampton Chronicle and Echo</i>
Gemma Bradley	<i>PA Media</i>	Aaron McMillan	<i>Fakenham & Wells Times</i>
Liane Castle	<i>Kent Messenger</i>	Alima Nadeem	<i>The Bolton News</i>
Rebecca Curry	<i>Hexham Courant</i>	Eleanor Ovens	<i>The Mail, Cumbria</i>
Alexander Davis	<i>North Devon Live</i>	Louise Perrin	<i>The Scarborough News</i>
Naomi De Souza	<i>Coventry Live</i>	Patrick Pester	<i>Live Science</i>
Timothy Edgley	<i>Southampton Daily Echo</i>	Thomas Reeves	<i>KentOnline</i>
Alec Evans	<i>Surrey Live</i>	Andrew Revill	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Gemma Gibson	<i>Salisbury Journal</i>	Imogen Isabella	
Joseph Hadden	<i>Diss Express</i>	Roberta Palmer	<i>Muddy Stilettos</i>
Georgia Harland	<i>Henley Standard</i>	Alana Roberts	<i>Sheffield Star</i>
Laura Harman	<i>Woman & Home</i>	Claire Schofield	<i>National World</i>
Joe Harrigan	<i>The Bolton News</i>	Lewis Smith	<i>Wales Online</i>
Sarah Hussain	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>	Emily Thomson	<i>Eastern Daily Press</i>
Alex Irwin-Hunt	<i>Financial Times</i>	Emily Turner	<i>The News, Portsmouth</i>
Harry Jamshidian	<i>Western Telegraph</i>	Lyell Tweed	<i>The Bolton News</i>
Lucy Jenkinson	<i>Whitehaven News</i>	James Vukmirovic	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Ben Jones	<i>Peterborough Evening Telegraph</i>	Carrington Walker	<i>Weston Mercury</i>

CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

Firstly, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all the successful candidates who have achieved their NQJ over the past academic year.

I know many of the successful candidates on a professional level across a number of publishing groups and am fully aware of the hard work and dedication that has gone into passing the qualification.

It has been no mean feat given the extraordinary challenges of the past two years and the ongoing challenges in the industry.

The NQJ is as rigorous and relevant as ever in a media environment changing faster than ever.

I would also like to offer my encouragement to those who haven't quite made it over the line. You will – and I look forward to that next time.

The latest set of results is encouraging, particularly the 78 per cent pass rate in media law and ethics in practice and a superb 100 per cent pass rate on the logbooks – a testament to some fine journalism and outstanding contact and audience building.

The vital role played by journalists up and down the country in covering and supporting their communities, speaking up for those who need a voice and holding power to account has never been more important.

The NCTJ continues to be the absolutely central pillar in enabling this to happen, so lastly, I would like to pay tribute to the staff who continue to work extraordinarily hard and flexibly to ensure the organisation adapts to changing times and challenges, delivers the very highest standards and provides trainees with the very best support and guidance.

To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NCTJ, the November exams featured the town of Oxdown, the fictional town that was synonymous with NCTJ exams of the past. It was a name imprinted on the minds of NCTJ-trained journalists who took preliminary/diploma and senior qualifications over previous decades. A fitting celebration.

Andy Martin
Chief examiner, National Qualification in Journalism



MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE

69 candidates; 54 passes – 78 per cent

To have the best chance of success in this exam, candidates must have good law knowledge and understanding of ethics, but that is not enough if it is not applied to the questions. Although candidates can take a copy of *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists* into the exam with them, they must be comfortable with its contents because there is little time to study it in detail during the exam. Candidates must do more than quote the relevant statutes and clauses; candidates must also be able to relate them to what the question is asking. Be analytical, what is the problem, why is that and do I have a defence? If not, what should I do?

Section four requires candidates to think about how ethics affect their jobs. There are not necessarily right or wrong answers, but candidates must be able to explain their thinking clearly so that examiners can see why they have come to the conclusions they have made.

Good time management is key to successfully completing this exam. Candidates should be aware of how much time they have overall, and how

many marks each question is worth. For example, a 20 mark question will need more time to answer than an 8 mark question.

As timing again appears to be an issue with some candidates, it might be appropriate to go back to basics when tackling an examination. How much time do I have? How many marks is each answer worth? Section four probably needs 30 minutes, leaving candidates 90 minutes for the first three sections.

Overall, the top-performing candidates produced some excellent answers, relating their knowledge to the exam scenarios, analysing the problems and giving clear and well-structured answers. As always, each exam had defamation and contempt questions, along with copyright, confidentiality, court reporting restrictions, including interviewing jurors, anonymity requirements and numerous clauses from the Editors' Code of Practice.

Crispin Clark
Chief moderator, media law and ethics in practice



PRACTICAL JOURNALISM SKILLS EXAMS

80 candidates; 49 passes – 61 per cent

The big news story and community journalism practical exams are designed to test a trainee's readiness for senior responsibility in the newsroom.

The big news story involves covering a fast-paced story for modern-day publication across all, or any, sections of the media and requires the trainee to adapt to changing circumstances as well as being mindful of everyday necessities. The story develops through progressive social media postings, press releases, statements and video/audio recordings in the same way a major news story would evolve in the newsroom. Newsroom management is also tested.

Candidates needed to remember the key principles of journalism, law and ethics that they would face in their day-to-day work. Some questions change in each exam, such as health and safety or internal communications, to test a candidate's leadership and management skills. The information sought in these questions needs to be pertinent to the story.

The November exam was about a spate of dog thefts. It began with one dog reported stolen by its owner from their back garden in Oxdown, with social media posts and images, and moved swiftly to the theft of two French bulldogs from a dog walker who was threatened at knifepoint in a local park. Other dog thefts in the area were reported, and there were reports of an unused farm building where suspicious activity linked to the dog thefts was investigated. Social media activity initially blamed a local traveller community for the spate of thefts, but information provided later on in the exam confirmed this was not the case. It was later reported that the two dogs stolen from the dog walker in the local park belonged to a well-known local celebrity. There were prolific social media posts, interviews with dog owners, eye witnesses and the owner of the farm building, as well as police statements. Most candidates were able to sift out relevant information for their news stories and describe how social media could help them. Questions relating to newsroom management gained lower marks.

The March exam focused on a fire at a builder's yard located near a number of residential housing developments. It began with the fire being reported on social media by the local fire station and police, with police then reporting that the fire had spread quickly across a number of buildings. Firefighters across the country were in attendance to get the

blaze under control. Surrounding roads were closed, residents were evacuated and people were advised to avoid the area. The story took a twist later on in the exam with an explosion at the builder's yard, leading to the collapse of part of the building and four firefighters being trapped in the debris. It was later reported that one of the firefighters had died of his injuries.

Some candidates struggled in this exam to get comprehensive stories which would give readers all the information they needed to understand the situation. Several candidates failed to answer one or more questions which cost marks - future candidates are urged to plan their exam timing carefully to ensure they are able to answer all the questions.

The July exam featured a city shopping centre lockdown while police and the army searched for an armed swordsman seen in the street. It was a fast-moving story with lots of social media input to complement the official police press releases and Twitter/Facebook postings. It ended with the police shooting the swordsman in the football stadium when he attacked a police dog.

Candidates are reminded to make full use of all their time to ensure that they don't miss questions and timed releases. Every question counts and all should be answered fully. One question which some candidates struggled with in the July exam was the health and safety question, where they were asked to look at the potential risks involved in covering the story and explain how they would mitigate them. This was not a story where reporters and photographers could safely be sent to photograph and interview people. Other ways of getting interviews were needed such as phoning the shops, making contact via social media to people who had posted, etc. Getting the story does not mean ignoring the risks.

The community journalism exam is designed for community journalists, many of whom are studying for the NQJ as part of the Community News Project in partnership with Meta.

The exam is based on a news scenario which tests the skills and knowledge required by candidates who are working in under-reported communities.

A central part of the exam is a major news story, designed to test news selection and writing an engaging story to length from a wealth of material.

As the story unfolds, a number of legal/ethical/regulatory issues are thrown up that challenge the candidate to say how they would deal with these



issues. These need the candidate to identify the issues, say what they would do and why, and explore any potential ramifications of their actions. Sometimes there is a “right or wrong” answer – sometimes there is not. In whichever circumstances, candidates should make clear their course of action, justify it and demonstrate an understanding of what the possible consequences are.

The November exam focused on a proposal from a land holdings company to build a new residential village on a farm in Oxdown, featuring 2,500 new homes. There was opposition to the sale and development of the land from local residents and the local MP, supported by Oxdown Action for Housing, a campaign group aimed at bringing forward practical solutions to the housing crisis in Oxdown and surrounding areas. Some of the candidates sitting this exam could have improved on their knowledge and application of law and ethics and being able to make decisions and justify them.

The March exam was about the alleged theft of a large number of vegetables from Incredible Edible, a community concept centred on the growing of vegetables in public spaces. Members of the public are encouraged to help themselves to the vegetables, and the food is often harvested by local groups and used to produce meals, typically in non-profit community cafés. It was later determined that the vegetables had in fact not been stolen, but had been taken by four young men seeking asylum in the UK, who thought it was okay to take the food based on it being there for the public.

Some candidates struggled in this exam to write stories which contained sufficient facts and information. Illustrative ideas were weak but there was a greater understanding of fact boxes and more debating of the ethical issues related to decision-making.

The July exam featured a story about finding dead fish in the river. This was a good community story which candidates seemed to enjoy getting their teeth into, demonstrating accomplished reporting and decisions. The pass rate for this sitting was the highest since the exam was introduced and is a credit to the candidates. Candidates showed adeptness in using social media to find information and engage with readers. Stories in Question 4 were better in content and story structure than in previous exams, and more thought was given to debating the ethical issues. Some avoidable mistakes did appear which showed the need to thoroughly read all the information given, take time to assimilate what it means in community terms, and allow time at the end of each section to re-read answers before time runs out or candidates move on.

Faith Lee

Chief moderator, the big news story and community journalism

The specialist brand publishing pathway was first piloted in November 2021 with apprenticeship candidates learning at PA Training.

The aim of the assessment is for candidates to demonstrate their awareness of how to use editorial content to build their publication's brand. The assessment is a feature package for the candidate's own title and involves hours of research and interviewing during office hours before the collation and writing on NQJ day. The story is published online and followed by social media promotion with the aim of building the brand's audience.

The high pass rate is credit to the candidates, who produced excellent work throughout. The editors also praised their candidates' work and were very pleased with their success.

The real-world nature of the project has been welcomed by industry editors and more candidates are in the pipeline.

John Dilley

Chief moderator, specialist brand publishing

E-LOGBOOK

56 candidates; 56 passes – 100 per cent

The last NQJ examiners' report published in 2021 noted a positive change which saw candidates gaining more support from their employers and a subsequent rise in the quality of work submitted – it is pleasing to note that this trend appears to be continuing in 2022.

The period of this report covers what is still a most traumatic time for those working in the industry, with Covid restrictions still playing a part while traditional methods of working have changed almost overnight.

Despite these challenges, candidates have dealt effectively with what has been required by our e-logbook categories which continue to test their abilities across a wide range of journalistic key tasks.

As before, we are pleased to see that the different e-logbook categories are clearly meeting the needs of news journalists, community journalists, production journalists, local democracy reporters and specialist brand publishers.

There have been no areas of concern to report in terms of submissions, but as always, if any current or future candidates have any issues or questions concerning the logbook, they should not hesitate to contact the NCTJ in the first instance.

Darren Isted
Chief moderator, e-logbook



RESULTS ANALYSIS

Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism results 2021-22

The below results summary details the overall NQJ results achieved in 2021-22:

TOTAL ENTRY	
No of candidates	86
No of passes	47
No of failures	39
% passed	55%

The below results summary details the breakdown of NQJ results achieved by exam section:

PRACTICAL SKILLS EXAMS	
No of candidates	80
No of passes	49
No of failures	31
% passed	61%

MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE	
No of candidates	69
No of passes	54
No of failures	15
% passed	78%

E-LOGBOOK	
No of candidates	56
No of passes	56
No of failures	0
% passed	100%

The below results summary details the breakdown of the overall NQJ results achieved by Pass, Merit and Distinction:

	NO OF CANDIDATES	% ACHIEVED
Distinction	19	40%
Merit	18	39%
Pass	10	21%



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