



NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

SEPTEMBER 2023

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This examiners' report covers the sittings of the Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) in 2022-23 (November 2022, March 2023 and July 2023).

Across the 2022-23 academic year, a total of 150 candidates sat at least one NQJ exam component. Of these 150 candidates, 89 were working towards completing the full qualification in these sittings. Over the three sittings, a total of 56 candidates achieved the qualification, a pass rate of 63 per cent.

The next examiners' report is due to be published in August 2024 and will cover the NQJ sittings in November 2023, March 2024 and July 2024.

AWARD WINNERS 2022-23

The award winners listed below have been selected from the candidates who sat the NQJ in November 2022, March 2023 and July 2023.



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

Toby Bryant, *National World*

Toby Bryant (90 per cent). An excellent exam in which Toby dropped only 15 marks. He showed thorough knowledge of both the law and ethics and was able to apply this to the scenarios, spotting problems and showing how to deal with them. His answers were succinct and easy to follow, leaving the marker able to concentrate on the all-round understanding shown without having to work out what Toby was trying to say. He showed no weaknesses and while writing style is not judged, it was a pleasure to read such a well-structured and knowledgeable exam script. Congratulations to a worthy winner.



LOGBOOK AWARD, SPONSORED BY NEWSQUEST

Jay Gardner (86 per cent), *BBC apprentice at University of Kent*

Jay should be very proud of his achievements and stories in this logbook, scoring the highest mark across 64 e-logbooks submitted country-wide. Jay's logbook hit all the key criteria and scored highly on all categories. His data, politics/government and marketplace/community involvement stories scored just under full marks. It was great to see a mix of radio and visual packages in this logbook as well as well-received stories on the BBC website. Jay is a very worthy winner.



PRACTICAL JOURNALISM SKILLS AWARD, SPONSORED BY ESSO

Megan Howe, *Shropshire Star*

Megan Howe (80 per cent). Megan's community journalism exam was excellent in all sections, showing clear ethical knowledge and an all-round journalistic ability to find information and deliver a clear concise story, with appropriate visual elements. She is a shining example of an outstanding community journalist.

The candidates listed below gained the National Qualification in Journalism in 2022-23:

Lewis Adams	<i>Colchester Gazette</i>	Kent Lawlor	<i>The Oldham Times</i>
Nathan Atkinson	<i>Telegraph and Argus</i>	Eleanor Lawson	<i>Express and Star</i>
Madeline Baillie	<i>Rutland and Stamford Mercury</i>	Richard Lemmer	<i>Portsmouth News</i>
Christian Barnett	<i>Worcester News</i>	Laura Longworth	<i>Burnley Express</i>
Toby Bryant	<i>Newcastle World</i>	James Lowson	<i>Bucks Herald</i>
Megan Carr	<i>Kent Online</i>	Eloise Maddocks	<i>BBC</i>
Imogen Clyde-Smith	<i>The Bolton News</i>	Sebastian Mann	<i>Lincolnshire Echo</i>
Anna Colivicchi	<i>Oxford Mail</i>	Daniel Mason	<i>Bauer Media Group</i>
Elizabeth Conway	<i>BBC</i>	Charlie Masters	<i>Iliffe</i>
George Crafer	<i>BBC</i>	Rebecca McGrath	<i>Newsquest</i>
Lois Dean	<i>Warrington Guardian</i>	Star McFarlane	<i>BBC</i>
Bill Edgar	<i>Newsquest North East</i>	Charlotte Moreau	<i>Hereford Times</i>
Shona Elliot	<i>BBC</i>	Noora Mykkanen	<i>Bucks Free Press</i>
Hinna Fazal	<i>Newbury Weekly News</i>	Ayokunle Oluwalana	<i>My London</i>
Victoria Finan	<i>Yorkshire Post</i>	Jacob Panons	<i>Eastbourne Herald</i>
Jay Gardner	<i>BBC</i>	William Payne	<i>TTG Media</i>
Anthony Gillan	<i>Sunderland Echo</i>	Chelsea Rocks	<i>BBC</i>
Nicole Goodwin	<i>ChronicleLive</i>	Haleema Saheed	<i>Telegraph and Argus</i>
Ruby Gregory	<i>My London</i>	Kiran Sajan	<i>Basingstoke Gazette</i>
Ella Hambly	<i>BBC</i>	Sofia Ferreira Santos	<i>BBC</i>
Matthew Hancock-Bruce	<i>Worcester News</i>	Aimee Seddon	<i>Lancashire Post</i>
Adam Marcus	<i>BBC</i>	Federica Stefani	<i>Highland News and Media</i>
Megan Hillery	<i>Northampton Chronicle</i>	Ashleigh Swan	<i>BBC</i>
Megan Howe	<i>Shropshire Star</i>	Matthew Taylor	<i>Grantham Journal</i>
Jessica Hubbard	<i>National World</i>	Jack Tooth	<i>Newsquest</i>
Rhiannon James	<i>Caerphilly Observer</i>	Charlotte Vowles	<i>Freelance</i>
Lucy-Ann Jones	<i>Newsquest Midlands</i>	India Wentworth	<i>Sussex World</i>
Georgia Langdon	<i>Hexham Courant</i>		

CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

I am delighted to present my report on another successful NQJ year.

First of all, sincere congratulations to everyone who has taken this rigorous and demanding qualification.

As both a working journalist and as a trainer, I know only too well just how much hard work, dedication and perspiration goes into the exam preparation.

These qualifications remain the gold standard for our industry and rightly so. We only need to take a quick glance at the world around us to see that trusted, trained, professional journalists are needed more than ever to hold public institutions and private organisations to account and speak truth to power. Well done to those who passed the NQJ. Your efforts have been well rewarded.

For those who still have a little way to go I offer my encouragement. Sometimes the difference between passing and not passing can be small and requires just one last push to re-sit successfully. This is the case in most of the instances I have seen.

I am really pleased to see the increase in candidates passing with distinction, up eight per cent on the last report.

I would also like to mention the terrific standard of the e-logbooks submitted by candidates with a 99 per cent pass rate, reflecting a superb standard of journalism in newsrooms up and down the country.

Finally I offer my heartfelt thanks to all the staff at the NCTJ for their own dedication to this vital qualification, their constant drive for high standards and the immense help and support to candidates and trainers.

Andy Martin
Chief examiner, National Qualification in Journalism



MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE

113 candidates; 79 passes – 70 per cent

Over the three examinations there were 113 candidates, some of whom were resits. This was an increase of 47 over the previous three exams covered by the Examiners' Report published in September 2022. Some of the exams are altered for community journalist candidates and those studying Scottish law. There was also one exam set for a specialist brand publishing candidate.

In November there were 28 candidates, of which 26 passed. March saw a big jump in numbers, 50, the largest group for more than four years. Of these, 35 passed. July saw numbers down to 35 and with it a disappointing drop in those who passed. Only 18 reached the 60 per cent threshold, a 51 per cent pass rate. The average for exams taken since November 2019 is 75 per cent.

As in previous reports, the advice to candidates is to revise and be comfortable with the contents of *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists*. Be analytical when reading questions and ask yourself: What is the problem, why is that and do I have a defence? If not, what should I do?

When it comes to section four, the ethical question, do not just copy out the relevant clauses, but also apply them to the scenario and explain why. Finally, leave yourself enough time in which to complete the exam thoroughly.

Keeping up to date with legal and ethical news is essential. Questions are often framed around real-life incidents, with the question in section four always based on an IPSO adjudication. Candidates are advised to sign up to either Hold the Front Page or Press Gazette to see their reports on legal and ethical issues.

Overall, the top-performing candidates produced some excellent answers and are to be congratulated. We wish future candidates, whether first-timers or resitters, good luck!

Crispin Clark
Chief moderator, media law and ethics in practice



PRACTICAL JOURNALISM SKILLS EXAMS

97 candidates; 65 passes – 67 per cent

Big news story

The big news story exam is designed to test a trainee's readiness for senior responsibility in the newsroom. The exam tests the many skills needed by a senior journalist. It is a test of news sense, ability to select the right facts, story-writing skills, the ability to present a story using different forms of media, working to deadlines and adeptness with digital and social media. Newsroom management is also tested.

The November exam was about the town of Bilbridge and the incoming threat of Storm Felipe which brought heavy rain and wind. Candidates receive various information from residents and the environment agency about the storm damage and the rapidly rising water concerning the River Bil. The police later release a statement announcing that someone has fallen into the river and that a search and rescue operation is under way. There are concerns from the mayor that The Wharfage is at risk of collapse. The reporter later finds out that a man has been rescued from the swollen river and was winched to safety by a helicopter crew. Some candidates were penalised for overwriting their main news story, costing them several marks.

The March exam focused on the large market town of Chepton. The town recently had a link road built with the headquarters for Cheshire Police sitting along it. Candidates find out from social media that the link road, 'Link Way', is closed following a serious accident. Three cars were involved in a collision outside the police headquarters with several people becoming injured. Two cars collided with each other, the third crashed into a bus stop trying to avoid the collision. Further on in the exam, candidates discovered the assistant chief constable was injured in the accident and a 39-year-old woman sadly died from her injuries.

A few candidates struggled with fully understanding the incident, describing it as a three-car crash. One car hit a bus stop and two cars collided with each other. Candidates are urged to ensure they read the section information carefully before writing their news stories.

The July exam started with reported car thefts in the small rural village of Branhall. As the exam developed; candidates were told about a missing baby who had been stolen with the mother's car off her driveway. Police statements are provided as well as pictures of the baby.

The baby is found safe and well at the end of the exam. Candidates were also provided with information about an ongoing incident with protesters outside a nearby hotel.

Some candidates were writing headlines and subheadings for their stories. They are to be reminded that these are not required for the exam and will affect the overall word count.

Candidates are also reminded to make full use of all their time to ensure they don't miss questions and timed releases. Every question counts and all should be answered fully.

Community journalism

The community journalism exam is designed for community journalists, many of whom are studying for the NQJ on the Community News Project.

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. Candidates are also expected to deal with a number of legal, ethical and regulatory issues by correctly identifying them and exploring any potential ramifications of their actions.

The November exam focused on the Shadwell Valley, a semi-rural area with a district council of the same name. The River Shad winds through the valley and on one section at Goldacre, there are remains of a 400-year-old water-powered cornmill. A local man discovers Anglo-Saxon gold coins using his metal detector on a public footpath on the bank of the river. The estate owner has been negotiating with a larger developer over the old mill land to create a business park. Residents have mixed views on the development site and whether the local man should be allowed to keep his findings. Candidates are provided with residents' views via Facebook pages, Twitter (now rebranded as X) and vox pops.

Some of the candidates sitting this exam did not answer all the questions and those who did, did not check the length of their stories and were disqualified from those questions for over/underwriting. Tweets were also not checked and resulted in 0 marks due to going over the 280-character limit.

The March exam centred around the potential closure of Darbridge pool and candidates receive several comments from council leaders, the council press officer and local contacts. Candidates were provided with information about the closure of public facilities across the UK. Candidates further learn of a potential library closure in the local area and the council's struggle with finances. Similar issues to the November exam cropped up again with candidates overwriting and producing two stories, not realising both counted towards the word limit.

The July exam featured Turnmouth and its beaches. The UKLI (UK Lifeboat Institution) has discovered that the local council has voted to not continue a £25,000 grant that funds its work. Candidates hear from the secretary of Turnmouth Tourism, the regional director of the UK Life Saving Society and many local residents with their thoughts on the loss of money and the possible introduction of drones to replace the lifeguards. Candidates performed well in this exam with five out of seven community journalists gaining a pass.

Faith Lee

Chief moderator, the big news story and community journalism

Specialist brand publishing

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.

One candidate sat the assessment in March and achieved a distinction mark of 72 per cent. They submitted a well put together package that clearly met their brand requirements and was worthy of a distinction.

John Dilley

Chief moderator, specialist brand publishing



E-LOGBOOK

64 candidates; 63 passes – 99 per cent

Over the period of this report we have seen candidates assimilating new ways of working while the industry continues to go through readjustment of remote and hybrid working.

And once more it has been clear that support is there from employers as we have noted strong results across the board with no major issues reported in any of the key tasks which are faced.

All of our logbook categories provide a sound test of capabilities and it is also pleasing to note that in our last cohort we saw a significant increase in entries from broadcast journalists, all of whom performed admirably.

If any current or future candidates have issues or questions concerning the logbook, they can contact the NCTJ and we will be happy to provide any assistance we can.

Darren Isted
Chief moderator, e-logbook



RESULTS ANALYSIS

Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism results 2022-23

The below results summary details the overall NQJ results achieved by candidates sitting the full qualification in 2022-23:

TOTAL ENTRY	
No of candidates	89
No of passes	56
No of failures	33
% passed	63%

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

PRACTICAL SKILLS EXAMS	
No of candidates	97
No of passes	65
No of failures	32
% passed	67%

MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE	
No of candidates	113
No of passes	79
No of failures	34
% passed	70%

E-LOGBOOK	
No of candidates	64
No of passes	63
No of failures	1
% passed	99%

The below results summary details the breakdown of the overall NQJ results by pass, merit and distinction:

	NO OF CANDIDATES	% ACHIEVED
Distinction	27	48%
Merit	27	48%
Pass	2	3%



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