

Instructions for centres - Security of NCTJ assessments 2025-26

These instructions are relevant to all NCTJ examinations held at NCTJ examination centres, in-office and remotely. They must be adhered to in accordance with NCTJ examination regulations. If a situation arises and there is any deviation from these instructions, the head of centre or person responsible for examinations must contact the NCTJ assessment team immediately to seek advice.

All NCTJ examinations are computer-based. The majority of NCTJ exams are sat online, in the NCTJ's online assessment platform, Cirrus. For any exams not sat or submitted on the Cirrus online assessment platform, learners are required to produce an electronic copy of their typed exam script for marking.

Delivery of papers (for exams not held on the Cirrus online platform)

1. The following assessments are delivered outside the Cirrus platform: editing skills for journalists, broadcast radio news, broadcast TV newscast, practical magazine journalism, and videojournalism for digital platforms.
2. Invigilation information and candidate documentation must be downloaded from the tutor/admin contact resources area via the NCTJ website. Centres must download all relevant documentation and circulate this to learners at least 48 hours prior to the exam. Any discrepancies must be reported to the NCTJ assessment team immediately.
3. The exam paper will be sent to the nominated NCTJ examinations contact at the centre **one hour** before the examination start time. The paper will be sent in pdf format via email. Any video/audio footage required for the exam will be sent to the nominated NCTJ examinations contact at the centre a minimum of **48 hours** before the exam. The footage will be sent via a secure SharePoint folder.
4. On receipt of the examination paper/exam footage, the centre must confirm receipt with the NCTJ. The centre is responsible for checking the exam footage upon receipt and must report any sound/playing quality issues with the NCTJ assessment team immediately.
5. The centre is responsible for uploading an electronic copy of the exam and audio/video footage on the centre computers to be used for the exam, for all learners. Any problems or issues downloading the exam or video/audio footage from SharePoint must be reported to the NCTJ exams team immediately.

6. The centre is responsible for providing all learners with the required procedures for learners' document at each exam. A copy of this can be downloaded via the tutor/admin contact resources.
7. All exam documentation must be stored securely in electronic format upon receipt, with access limited a maximum of three centre staff. Open access to exam papers and exam video/audio footage is not permitted.
8. The NCTJ must be informed immediately if the security of the exam papers or exam video/audio footage is put at risk under any circumstances.
9. **Exam papers and exam video/audio footage must not be shared, copied or amended under any circumstances.** This is a breach of NCTJ copyright and is considered an example of malpractice/maladministration. If a centre discovers a problem with the exam papers or the exam footage, they must contact the NCTJ immediately. Exam papers and video/audio footage for sample exams will be provided to centres separately by the NCTJ.
10. For exams delivered remotely via Zoom, the invigilator is responsible for providing learners with an electronic link to the exam paper and any video/audio footage required a minimum of 30 minutes before the start time of the exam. Please refer to the remote exam centre procedures and invigilation notes for further details.

Online exams (Cirrus assessment platform)

1. The following assessments are delivered on the online Cirrus platform: essential journalism, the newspaper magazine regulation test, essential media law, court reporting, public affairs, PR & communications, introduction to PR for journalists, broadcast regulation, shorthand, sports journalism, business and finance, business of magazines, journalism for a digital audience, data journalism, NQJ big news story, NQJ community journalism, and NQJ media law and ethics in practice.
2. For these exams, it is the responsibility of the centre to have downloaded the appropriate version of safe exam browser and the NCTJ configuration file onto every exam computer. Instructions for these downloads are sent to centres by the NCTJ assessment team. Please note: safe exam browser is not required for the in-centre delivery of exams for shorthand, NQJ big news story, NQJ community journalism and NQJ media law and ethics in practice. Safe exam browser is also not required for the delivery of remote exams.
3. The centre is responsible for ensuring that learners have the correct login details to log onto the Cirrus assessment platform. A candidate's username is their

NCTJ registered email address and their password is their six-digit NCTJ unique reference number (URN).

4. For exams delivered remotely using the Proctorio software, it is the responsibility of the centre to ensure learners have downloaded and tested the Proctorio extension to Google Chrome a minimum of 24 hours before the date of the exam. The Proctorio extension is required for the delivery of all remote exams on Cirrus.
5. **Recordings, screen shots or copies of the exam on Cirrus must not be taken under any circumstances.** This is a breach of NCTJ copyright and is considered an example of malpractice/maladministration.
6. Scripts for exams held on the Cirrus platform are submitted on the platform by each individual candidate, using the 'complete assessment' button. If a candidate does not submit their script before the end of the exam, the script will be automatically submitted by Cirrus when the allotted time given for the exam has elapsed.

Collection of scripts (for exams not held on the Cirrus online platform)

1. Learners must save their script as a pdf and name the file with the exam paper reference and their six-digit NCTJ candidate unique reference number (URN). It is also advisable to include the module name, candidate's URN and the exam date in the header, before the document is converted to pdf.
2. Learners must check that all pages of their exam script are submitted.
3. For modules where coursework is also required along with the exam script, learners are required to ensure that all elements are submitted. **Any incomplete submissions will be marked accordingly and any missing parts will not be marked.**
4. It is the invigilator's responsibility to check that all submissions have been collated as per the attendance list provided. All scripts must be collected electronically before the learners are allowed to leave the examination room.
5. The invigilator must sign the invigilation certificate provided and return it to the NCTJ, noting any issues that have arisen during the examination.
6. For internally assessed exams, an NCTJ marking sheet must be completed and submitted to the NCTJ for each submission.
7. If a script is submitted in handwritten form due to computer failure, an explanatory letter must be submitted by the head of centre or person responsible for examinations with the scripts.

8. All exam scripts and other exam documentation should be handled by the person at the centre responsible for returning the scripts to the relevant internal markers or to the NCTJ.
9. Exams that are marked internally by the centre in the first instance may only be marked by approved centre markers who have attended an appropriate marking workshop within the last two years.
10. Scripts must be submitted to the NCTJ electronically via a file in SharePoint, within 24 hours of the exam date if it is being marked externally or within two weeks of the exam date if it is being marked internally. Internally marked exams must be returned to the NCTJ with the completed mark sheets.
11. For exams held remotely via Zoom, invigilators must send a link to all learners a minimum of 30 minutes before the exam to a secure submissions folder in SharePoint for their completed exams to be uploaded to. At the end of the exam, learners must share their computer screens with the invigilator one at a time and the invigilator must check with each candidate to ensure the upload process to the submissions folder in SharePoint has been completed. Learners may also email their completed submissions to the invigilator as a back-up in case of any issues. The invigilator is responsible for confirming successful completion of the exam and sending the submissions to the relevant internal markers or to the NCTJ for marking.
12. Centres should retain a copy of all learners' scripts in pdf format, as tutors may wish to refer to them at a later date for feedback purposes.

Exam documentation

1. Exam documentation must be returned in electronic format to the NCTJ exams team, within 24 hours of the exam date. This documentation includes completed invigilation certificates and marks and attendance sheets, where applicable.
2. If it is necessary to keep exam documentation at the centre overnight, they must be stored securely at the centre and the NCTJ must be notified of the delay.

Assessments marked by centres

1. For internally marked assessments, marking must be completed and results submitted to the NCTJ within **two weeks** of the exam date to allow for moderation to take place. For exams delivered outside the Cirrus platform, results must be returned to the NCTJ on the marks and attendance list, signed by the marker.

2. Centres are reminded that if they choose to issue provisional results to their students, these are provisional results only and the NCTJ has the right to alter the results following moderation, if the standard of marking is not agreed.
3. Centres are required to retain internally marked exam scripts securely for a minimum period of **twelve months** to retain sufficient evidence of assessments made on an individual candidate's performance. For BA courses, centres may wish to consider keeping exam scripts for the duration of the course. This requirement is not applicable for any exams sat or submitted online in the Cirrus platform.
4. Exam scripts may be required by the NCTJ at any time and must be made available on request.

Assessments marked externally

1. In the editing skills for journalists' exam, page layouts for Part A-D must be returned to the NCTJ electronically in pdf format, via SharePoint.
2. Exam submissions must be submitted to the NCTJ immediately after the exam has finished, or within 24 hours of the exam taking place. If this is not possible due to a large number of learners, please contact the NCTJ assessment team directly.
3. For exams delivered remotely, all marking is conducted electronically.
4. It is not the NCTJ's policy to return exam scripts to learners. Exam scripts are considered the property of the NCTJ.

Suspicion of malpractice or maladministration

It is the responsibility of a centre to immediately report to the NCTJ any suspicion of malpractice or maladministration by a candidate or a member of centre staff. Please refer to the NCTJ's malpractice and maladministration policy for further details.

Centres will be liable to unannounced spot checks by the NCTJ to check on exam arrangements.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THE ABOVE COULD COMPROMISE THE INTEGRITY OF ASSESSMENTS AND MAY LEAD TO THE WITHDRAWAL OF CENTRE ACCREDITATION.