



NCTJ QUALITY ASSURANCE  
AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

# Annual Report

2024-25



# Introduction

**The NCTJ quality assurance and standards (QA&S) committee meets annually, or more frequently when required, to oversee quality, standardisation and fairness across all qualifications.**

Areas considered, monitored and discussed by the committee include:

- standardisation
- results analysis
- exam incidents
- customer service – centre and learner feedback, complaints
- equal opportunities
- reasonable adjustments and special considerations
- appeals
- suspected malpractice and maladministration
- compliance with Ofqual, CCEA (Northern Ireland) and Qualifications Wales' general conditions of recognition
- emerging trends and/or issues.

Committee membership is drawn from representatives of different sectors delivering NCTJ qualifications along with industry professionals, the NCTJ principal examiner and members of the NCTJ senior management team. It is chaired by an independent representative appointed by the NCTJ board of directors. The post is currently held by Jonathan Baker. Jonathan is an award-winning, NCTJ-qualified journalist, editor and journalism trainer who has worked across print, radio and television journalism. He was founding professor of journalism at the University of Essex, he received the NCTJ chairman's award for his outstanding contribution to high journalism education and training, and is author of *Essential Journalism*, the NCTJ guide for trainee journalists. Jonathan was a member of Ofcom's content board until September 2023.

This report is compiled to help explain the work of the committee, and to share some of the data it examines, reviews and debates, to ensure the reliability and transparency of NCTJ services.

# Qualification results analysis

## Certificate in Foundation Journalism 2024-25

Number of CFJ candidates, unit assessments submitted and candidates who completed the CFJ in 2024-25 and 2023-24, for comparison, are shown below:

	2024-25	2023-24
Number of distant learners	77	62
Number of candidates registered on courses at an approved centre	28	33
Total number of candidates who submitted unit assessments to NCTJ for marking	105	95
Total number of unit assessments submitted to NCTJ for marking	258	392
Total number of candidates who completed the full CFJ qualification	40	40

## Diploma in Journalism 2024-25

During 2024-25, 8,606 diploma examinations (excluding shorthand) were sat (including resits). This is an increase of 56 sittings from exams sat in 2023-24. Overall achievement figures for the 2024-25 academic year have been tabled below for each module of the Diploma in Journalism.

## Diploma in Journalism (exam sittings) results summary 2024-25

Exam	No. of Sittings	Gold Standard		A-E pass rate	
Essential Journalism	1260	825	65%	1238	98%
Newspaper Magazine Regulation Test	1263	874	69%	1190	94%
Essential Media Law & Regulation	1303	878	67%	1163	89%
Court Reporting	674	469	70%	614	91%
Public Affairs	1001	660	66%	909	91%
Sports Journalism	277	184	66%	270	97%
Editing Skills for Journalists	204	142	70%	201	99%
Videojournalism for Digital Platforms	593	534	90%	591	100%
Business & Finance	19	18	95%	19	100%
PR & Communications for Journalists	80	60	75%	80	100%
Intro to PR for Journalists	175	142	81%	173	99%
Journalism for a Digital Audience	620	520	84%	614	99%
Data Journalism	283	243	88%	282	100%
Practical Magazine Journalism	247	222	90%	246	100%
Broadcast Journalism – TV News	123	102	83%	116	94%
Broadcast Journalism – Radio News	190	176	93%	183	96%
Broadcast Journalism – Regulation	294	245	83%	292	99%
<b>Total no. of exam sittings</b>	<b>8606</b>	<b>6294</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>8181</b>	<b>95%</b>

Over half of the exams marked in each module have been awarded the industry gold standard of an A-C grade, with the overall majority achieving an E grade or above.

## E-portfolios

In the 2024-25 academic year, 937 e-portfolios were submitted for assessment. This is an increase of 97 compared to the previous year. Of these submissions, 95 per cent were awarded the industry gold standard of an A-C grade. In 2023-24, 95 percent were also awarded the gold standard.

## Shorthand exams

The number of sittings, passes and pass rates for each shorthand speed for 2024-25 are shown below:

Speed	Number of sittings	Number of passes	Pass rate
60	1101	320	29%
80	424	122	28%
100	651	111	17%
110	13	2	15%
120	7	4	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2196</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>25%</b>

There was a 17 per cent pass rate at 100wpm compared to 16 per cent in 2023-24 – an increase of 1 percentage point. The pass rate at 60wpm increased by 2 percentage points from 27 per cent in 2023-24 to 29 per cent in 2024-25.

## Apprenticeships 2024-25

Number of apprentices in 2024-25 and 2023-24, for comparison, are shown below:

	2024-25	2023-24
Number of apprentices registered on the L7 senior journalist standard	84	63
Number of apprentices registered on the L5 journalist standard	82	88
<b>Total number of apprentices registered</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>151</b>

In 2024-25, a total of 166 apprentices were registered with the NCTJ on apprenticeship courses.

Number of end-point assessments submitted in 2024-25 and 2023-24, for comparison, are shown below:

	2024-25	2023-24
Number of L7 senior journalist standard end-point assessments completed	49	28
Number of L5 senior journalist standard end-point assessments completed	64	46
Number of L3 junior journalist standard end-point assessments completed*	0	14
<b>Total number of end-point assessments completed</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>88</b>

\***Note:** The L3 junior journalist was withdrawn in 2023.

## National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) 2024-25

During 2024-25, a total of 112 candidates were working towards completing the full qualification.

In 2023-24, 129 candidates were working towards the full qualification.

Over three sittings of the NQJ exams held in March, July and November, a total of 80 candidates achieved the qualification – a pass rate of 71 per cent. This is an increase of 4 percentage points from 2023-24.

The results below summarise the breakdown of NQJ results by exam section in 2024-25:

NQJ	No. of sittings	Number of passes	Pass rate
Media law and ethics in practice	134	92	69%
Practical journalism skills exams	109	56	51%
E-logbook	89	89	100%
<b>Total no. of exam sittings</b>	<b>332</b>		



## Student Council feedback

The purpose of the council is to provide a forum for students to tell the NCTJ what they think about the NCTJ training scheme and how it can be improved. It is a condition of accreditation that all NCTJ accredited courses are represented on the student council. All council members are responsible for providing feedback to the NCTJ during their course and act as a direct link with students.

The NCTJ's Student Council 2024 took place on Friday, 30 May. Held online, the student council brought together 31 representatives from accredited courses. The two-hour session included an NCTJ Q&A session, a work experience focus session and an "ask the industry expert" with Mark Waldron and Joan Cummins, finale:

Key topics raised in the Q&A included:

- **Exam timings and the need to reflect regional differences**
- **A request for more on AI, suggesting an infographic similar to the NCTJ's safety resource**
- **Difficulty engaging with the public affairs textbook, with a preference for McNae's clarity**

In a closing Q&A, Mark Waldron and Joan Cummins stressed how the NCTJ qualification is preparing you for employment (including shorthand) while highlighting that it is their ability to convey their passion and curiosity that help candidates stand out. The session was really well received with many students putting forward questions.

## Complaints

The NCTJ publishes its policy and procedure for dealing with complaints on its website.

Five complaints were received by the NCTJ in 2024-25. None were upheld.

One of the complaints made to the NCTJ in 2024-25 related to a candidate having an issue with a centre, but requested that their fees be refunded by NCTJ. This agreement is solely between complainant and the centre and therefore NCTJ was unable to intervene in this matter.

One complaint related to a candidate's employer and not the candidate themselves. NCTJ contacted the employer to highlight the issue.

Two complaints related to refund requests for distance learning materials. Both had purchased the courses some years ago, had not completed them and were well outside of the 14 day refund period.

One complaint related to a candidate asking for a refund of her distance learning materials and exams, despite them successfully achieving gold standard.

## Reasonable adjustments and special considerations

The NCTJ welcomes and is sensitive to candidates with particular needs and encourages them to take NCTJ examinations and assessments. Where required, the needs of candidates are addressed on a case-by-case basis. Any adjustment that the NCTJ approves must not alter the nature, rigour or integrity of the assessment. Any adjustment to assessments must not give the learner an unfair advantage or disadvantage over others. The NCTJ's policy concerning the application of reasonable adjustments can be found [here](#).

In 2024-25, 282 candidates had reasonable adjustments approved for NCTJ examinations and/or assessments. This is an increase of 15 compared to 2023-24.

In 2024-25, the greatest number of reasonable adjustment approvals made were for candidates with dyslexia, ADHD, specific learning difficulties, autism, dyspraxia and anxiety/mental health conditions or a combination.

## Appeals

The NCTJ publishes its policy and procedure for dealing with appeals on its website. The policy covers appeals of assessment results and appeals relating to other decisions made by the NCTJ.

In 2024-25 a total of 14 appeals were submitted, three less than the number submitted in 2023-24. Of these 14, seven were successfully upheld. All 14 of the appeals were about assessment results. There were no independent reviews of an assessment appeal submitted to the NCTJ in 2024-25.

## Exam incidents

A total of 12,865 assessments were sat in 2024-25. The table below shows the number of exam incidents in 2024-25 and 2023-24, for comparison:

	2024-25	2023-24	Difference between 24/25 and 23/24
Breach of remote exams procedures (exams declared null and void)	23	68	-45
Minor exam setting error	3	1	+2
Technical issues	0	5	-5
Other	0	0	0
<b>Total number of incidents</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>-48</b>

## Spot checks

For exams held remotely, the NCTJ checks the Proctorio recordings for Cirrus exams based on suspicion level, RAG rating and any flags for suspicious end attempts and ID checks. The NCTJ conducted Proctorio checks for 1028 exams sat remotely in the 2024-25 academic year. This is 31 less than were checked in the 2023-24 academic year.

This year, the NCTJ identified 23 breaches of procedure from these spot checks which led to exams being declared null and void, compared to 68 in 2023-24. The NCTJ also identified 8 instances of suspected candidate malpractice from these checks which required investigation, compared to 13 in 2023-24.

The NCTJ also conducted sample spot checks on recordings for exams delivered remotely via Zoom. There were no breaches of procedure identified from these checks.

The NCTJ will continue to spot check remote exams using the process outlined above in 2025-26.

29 traditional spot checks on in-centre exams were carried out on all centres running courses in 2024-25. One spot check resulted in a pass with conditions due to minor concerns/breaches of procedure. In 2023-24 three spot checks resulted in a pass with conditions. No checks resulted in a Fail.

## Suspected malpractice and maladministration

**The NCTJ publishes its policy and procedure for dealing with cases of suspected malpractice and/or maladministration by centres and candidates on its website.**

Number of suspected malpractice and maladministration cases investigated in 2024-25 and 2023-24, for comparison, are shown below:

		Cases 2024-25	Cases 2023-24	Difference between 23/24 and 22/23
Malpractice – Individual candidates	Distance learners	6	4	+2
	On accredited courses, including apprentices	6	8	-2
Maladministration – centres		0	1	-1
<b>Total number of suspected malpractice/maladministration cases</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>-1</b>

With regards to malpractice, 8 incidents involved remote exams, and 4 incidents involved exams delivered in-centre (or other assessments e.g. e-portfolio).

In all cases, investigations were carried out by the NCTJ and, where applicable, sanctions were applied e.g. exams were declared null and void, candidates were banned from sitting exams remotely. For incidents of candidate malpractice which occurred at centres, the centre was instructed to collect initial statements from relevant parties at the centre and to provide a malpractice report to the NCTJ to assist with our findings. Ongoing checks continue to monitor centres where candidate malpractice was confirmed, where applicable.

The NCTJ takes reports of suspected malpractice or maladministration extremely seriously. Each incident investigated is reviewed by the quality assurance and standards committee. Any sanctions applied in accordance with the NCTJ sanctions policy, which is published on the NCTJ website, are also reviewed to ensure a fair and consistent approach is taken to each case.

## Conflicts of interest

Key stakeholders, and the individuals who work for them, are involved in a range of activities and have a range of functions with the NCTJ. The NCTJ recognises the need to prevent or minimise potential conflicts and identify and manage conflicts of interest to maintain the integrity of its qualifications and awarding organisation functions.

Our conflicts of interest policy aims to draw attention to the possibility of conflicts, minimise or prevent a conflict occurring and manage conflicts that have arisen. Our conflicts of interest policy can be viewed on our website [here](#).

## Annual self-evaluation

To ensure that systems of internal control continue to be robust and effective, the NCTJ has in place an annual self-evaluation process which monitors our compliance with the regulators' general conditions of recognition. As part of this process the NCTJ commissions an independent consultant to conduct an annual audit of evidence of the NCTJ's compliance with certain areas of the regulators' conditions of recognition, with oversight of the NCTJ risk register. Any observations and recommendations from this audit are logged in an internal self-evaluation action plan which is implemented to strengthen and enhance our AO processes and procedures. This plan details any identified recommendations/issues/risks, the action and evidence required to rectify them, who is responsible for the action and when the action must be completed by.

For 2024-25 a different approach was taken. Rather than an audit taking place in September/October 2025 and focusing on key lines of enquiry that Ofqual publish around this time, a full audit of all NCTJ's processes and documents was commissioned in January 2025. The audit highlighted many strengths and few areas for improvement. The main area requiring action to ensure compliance was the creation of a written process for correcting results after they are issued. A process was created in March 2025.

An action plan for 2024-25 detailing other areas for improvement relate mainly to updating of some documents including policies and procedures, This action plan is reviewed monthly by all NCTJ staff to ensure that actions are completed by the dates specified.

## Event notifications

As a recognised awarding organisation, the NCTJ must promptly notify the regulatory bodies when it has cause to believe that any event has occurred, or is likely to occur, which could have an adverse effect on learners. Examples of such events may include those where:

- **there has been a loss or theft of, or a breach of confidentiality in, any assessment materials**
- **the awarding organisation believes that there has been an incident of malpractice or maladministration, which could invalidate the award of a qualification which it makes available**
- **the awarding organisation has issued incorrect results or certificates**
- **the awarding organisation is named as a party in any criminal or civil proceedings or is subjected to a regulatory investigation or sanction by any professional, regulatory, or government body**

The NCTJ made no notifications to Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA in 2024-25.



## Report from the chair of the committee

**The committee reviewed the NCTJ's policies and protocols relating to quality and standards and discussed its results and performance over the previous 12 months.**

It was agreed that the NCTJ needed to ensure it remains on the front foot in dealing with issues relating to artificial intelligence. There are various elements to this: the extent to which students should be allowed or encouraged to use AI in their coursework, and the measures required to identify potential abuse; the extent to which the NCTJ and course tutors might themselves use AI in exam setting and marking; and the need for the NCTJ and course tutors to keep pace with industry approaches to AI, and ensure that they are reflected in the syllabus.

The committee noted that a considerable amount of activity was going on in all these distinct but linked strands, and more was planned. The committee welcomed this progress and emphasised the importance of clear oversight as work develops. Members suggested the NCTJ to designate a named lead to co-ordinate all this activity and ensure that it was kept in constant focus.

For the first time at this meeting, there was a discussion about cyber security. It was noted that recent high-profile external cases had increased awareness of the dangers of a security breach, and the significant long-term disruption that could result. This is also a concern for Ofqual, which has made security measures a condition of compliance. It was noted that the NCTJ had recently achieved Cyber Essentials accreditation and was now weighing the potential cost and benefits of Cyber Essentials Plus. Cyber security is reflected in the risk register.

Across the rest of the piece, the concerns raised were familiar ones that continue to require sustained attention. These include:

- **Court reporting.** The committee noted another fall in the number of students taking this module, which cannot be separated from ongoing challenges with shorthand. Members discussed a proposal raised at other boards for a court reporting specialist module that did not require shorthand. This is an accreditation matter, as it is technically possible to do this anyway under existing arrangements. It was acknowledged that there are now means by which cases could be reported without attendance in court – those dealt with by the Single Justice Procedure, for example – and for which shorthand would not be essential. But it remains a requirement for conventional reporting of bigger or longer cases.
- **Shorthand.** The pass rates remain low, even at 60wpm. Members asked whether the figures could be interrogated to show the number of students taking the test rather than the total number of tests. It was reported that centres are entering students for tests multiple times, even when they have limited prospect of passing. This practice distorts the figures and disguises the true picture. However, the overall position remains that although the NCTJ (led by industry) continues to champion the preference for shorthand, students are struggling to achieve entry-level speeds and are generally avoiding it where possible.

- **Customer feedback.** Very few learners are returning the evaluation questionnaires, and it was proposed that forms be redesigned and promoted more actively to increase the chances of more helpful responses. The most useful feedback continues to come from face-to-face discussions during accreditation visits and other forums.
- **Equal opportunities monitoring.** Once again, too few students supplied information (which of course they are not obliged to do) for any meaningful data to be produced, or conclusions drawn. Although the NCTJ would very much like to have these figures to inform its equality, diversity and inclusion work, successive efforts to collate them over many years have not produced sufficiently robust data. The effort being devoted to the process is delivering limited actionable insight. The committee wondered whether it would be appropriate to consider whether the current approach remains proportionate, or whether an alternative method of monitoring would be more effective.

Alongside these continuing challenges, almost all other aspects of activity demonstrated highly satisfactory outcomes, for which the NCTJ is to be commended. Exam results followed the trend of recent years, and there was a further surge in sittings for the digital modules. A pleasing increase in the number of candidates for the broadcast journalism modules was noted. Cases of malpractice and maladministration represented a tiny fraction of the total sittings and had been dealt with promptly and decisively.

In 2024, the NCTJ commissioned an external audit of some of its policies and practices and drew up an action plan in response to the findings. A further survey, covering the full range of policies, was conducted in early 2025. The external consultant found the NCTJ to be compliant bar just one small point of detail (now remedied) and noted that it had robust processes in place in almost all others. Recommendations for improvements or tweaks were relatively minor in nature and have since been implemented. Further evaluations of individual aspects of the NCTJ's work will be commissioned on an ad hoc basis as necessary or desirable.

The committee was pleased with the report and the NCTJ's prompt and positive response to it. The findings endorsed the committee's own view that the NCTJ is a well-run and well-organised operation: fully compliant; committed to the thorough and efficient measurement and evaluation of its own performance; flexible in the face of staff movements and other factors; and outward-looking in its response to the changing nature and demands of the industry it serves. Members congratulated the chief executive and asked her to convey to her team their appreciation of their efforts.

***Jonathan Baker***

Chairman, quality assurance and standards committee



Quality, trust and  
diversity in journalism

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