

# Diploma in Journalism

## Examiners' Report

2018-19



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**2018-19**

During the academic year 2018-19, a total of 1552 candidates were registered on courses with the NCTJ to sit the Diploma in Journalism exams. 1263 candidates were studying on accredited courses and 286 on non-accredited courses, but may have sat NCTJ exams. Candidates also sit NCTJ Diploma in Journalism exams on national exam dates, for example students studying via distance learning.

### **Award winners (best performance in a diploma exam)**

Diploma in Journalism award winners for 2018-19 will be announced at the NCTJ's upcoming student council event, on 31 January 2020. Following this event, this report will be updated with the names of the award winners. Awards are presented in the following categories:

**Essential journalism**

**Essential media law**

**Media law court reporting**

**Public affairs**

**Shorthand 100wpm**

**Shorthand 110/120wpm**

**Broadcast journalism**

**Production journalism**

**Business of magazines**

**Videojournalism for online**

**Sports journalism**

# Principal examiner's summary

With the media undergoing rapid change, all NCTJ core and optional subjects are regularly reviewed to ensure they are robust, relevant and responsive to the needs of the industry. Each year, the NCTJ subject exam boards (which include industry representatives) and their teams of examiners review syllabus content, assessments and exam results, identifying any trends or slippages that may occur and ensuring that a consistent standard is applied across all modules within the qualification.

Candidates are expected to not only demonstrate a working knowledge of each area but apply their knowledge and skills to realistic media settings and scenarios. The move to bespoke exam setting in public affairs, essential media law & regulation and court reporting, where most questions are based on relevant and up-to-date scenarios, has been very successful and the currency of these exams has been well-received by tutors and candidates.

Updates for 2019-20 include new categories and changes to guidelines for the e-portfolio module, to ensure candidates continue to demonstrate the key skills required by the industry. The exam for the sports journalism module has also been updated following a consultation with the industry. New elective options – data journalism and journalism for a digital audience – are available for centres to pilot for the first time in 2019-20.

The project to transfer exams for the Diploma in Journalism to the NCTJ online Cirrus platform is complete, with the final six electives moving to online exams from September 2019. The move to assessment on Cirrus has gone smoothly and feedback from candidates and markers has been largely positive. Exams for broadcast TV and radio, production journalism and videojournalism are not delivered on Cirrus due to the use of specialist software.

Overall, the 2018-19 results are encouraging and show that the number of candidates achieving the gold standard in each subject is generally consistent with previous years. In some instances, such as the e-portfolio, newspaper magazine regulation test and broadcast TV and radio, there has been an increase in the number of candidates achieving A-C grades.

The NCTJ's commitment to maintaining standards and relevance continues to be well received by candidates and industry alike. I would also like to thank the chief examiners and their colleagues on each of the exam boards for their hard work in 2018-19, especially their dedication to ensuring that NCTJ standards are current and that NCTJ trainees are effectively prepared for an ever-changing media environment.

**Amanda Ball, NCTJ principal examiner**

# Essential journalism

With a record number of exam sittings in 2018-19 (1439 against 1436 for 2017-18) it is gratifying to note that passes at gold standard were almost identical at 54 per cent compared with 55 per cent the previous year.

Out of these gold standard passes, 3 per cent were at A grade, the same proportion as the previous year, while B and C grades were very similar at 17 per cent (16 per cent in 2017-18) and 33 per cent (35 per cent in 2017-18) respectively.

The 2018-19 academic year saw a number of new markers join the essential journalism marking team. With these changes in the background, it was vital to ensure that consistency in marking and exam standards were maintained.

Although pass rates have remained similar, the exam setters have endeavoured to ensure that while the basic framework of the essential journalism exam remains consistent, the exam scenarios present an appropriate challenge to candidates.

Both the programme of study and the valuable essential top tips for tutors have been updated to reflect changes in the fast-moving world of journalism and emphasise the unchanging importance of core skills like accuracy and use of language that is clear, concise and compelling.

Updates to the Cirrus platform have enhanced the markers' experience and thanks go to all the markers and moderators for their consistently high standard of marking.

**Nick Nunn, chief examiner  
Essential journalism**



# E-portfolio

New guidelines introduced for 2018-19 were aimed at making the e-portfolio requirement more flexible. This greater flexibility is reflected in the results which have seen an increase from the results achieved the previous year, with 91 per cent achieving gold standard in 2018-19 compared to 88 per cent in 2017-18.

Work remains of a good standard in general and the majority of markers have marked to a consistently high standard. Centre markers are reminded to continue to include comments on the e-portfolios, particularly in cases where a

very high or very low mark has been awarded. New mandatory categories and guidelines introduced in 2019-20 should improve completion rates and make the process more self explanatory.

The standard of video and mobile submissions continues to increase significantly and the expectation is that these will continue to improve as courses increase focus on digital skills. Candidates achieving higher grades showed the ability to source, research and present their own stories rather than relying on press releases or subject matter covered in class.

**Clare Gladstone, chief moderator  
E-portfolio**



# Essential journalism ethics and regulation

It was encouraging to see an improved performance in the newspaper magazine regulation test, with the number achieving gold standard rising from 66 per cent the previous year to 74 per cent in 2018-19. There was also a marginal increase in those achieving A-E from 95 to 96 per cent, clearly indicating an overall rise in standards.

**John Wilson, chief examiner  
Essential journalism ethics and regulation**

# Essential media law and court reporting

The gold standard pass rate in the essential media law exam reduced from 70 per cent in 2017-18 to 65 per cent in 2018-19, but this pass rate remains close to the rates in recent years, and so the drop is not a matter of concern. The A-E grade pass rate in 2018-19 was 89 per cent, down from 93 per cent the previous year.

In the court reporting exam, there was a decrease in the gold standard pass rate from 71 per cent in 2017-18 to 66



per cent in 2018-19, but again this does not cause concern. The A-E grade pass rate was 90 per cent, down from 92 per cent the previous year.

Overall, the results for both exams suggest candidates are finding the exams challenging which reflects the media law environment in which journalists operate.

The overall results suggest that both exams set the same level of challenge, which too is board policy. For example, the proportion of candidates achieving an A grade was around 20 per cent for each exam.

There was some variation in the gold standard pass rate between individual sittings, but differences in the cohorts of candidates in each sitting means we cannot conclude that some exams were harder than others. The board strives to ensure there is consistency in the level of challenge posed by the exams, and as chief examiner I seek to ensure that consistency when making final approval checks on the content of each exam.

**Mark Hanna, chief examiner  
Media law**



*Ulster University students in Stormont on a historic day for Northern Ireland, as MLAs sit for the first time for nearly three years*

## Public affairs

Public affairs continues to be a popular module, with 1264 exam entries in 2018-19, which is slightly down on the entries for 2017-18. The pass rate remains consistent with 64 per cent of candidates achieving the gold standard, as in 2017-18, and 91 per cent achieving an A-E pass, slightly higher than the previous year.

The public affairs exam board reviews the content of the programme of study each year, keeping a close eye on what subjects are being covered in the media to ensure the currency of what is being taught.

As Brexit has dominated the news agenda in the last 2-3 years, many core areas covered in the programme of

study have assumed greater significance. The board does, however, remove material from the programme of study which becomes less relevant and we consult tutors on content at the marking workshops, which afford the opportunity for a useful dialogue with colleagues.

The 2018-19 academic year saw the introduction of public affairs exams on the Cirrus online platform. The move has gone well and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The moderation of marking in 2018-19, which is also done on Cirrus, showed a consistently good standard of assessment by tutors, which is very welcome.

**Amanda Ball, chief examiner  
Public affairs**

# Shorthand

Shorthand exams continue to be offered at speeds from 60 to 80wpm and at 100 to 120wpm.

Exams are held every month (except August) with a selection of speeds on offer. The 100wpm exam is offered every month to give candidates as many opportunities as possible to sit the exam and achieve the industry gold standard.

In 2018-19 there were 3664 shorthand exam sittings compared to 3726 sittings in 2017-18. This is a decrease of 62 sittings.

There was a decrease of 39 sittings at 70wpm, a decrease 20 sittings at 80wpm, a decrease of 85 sittings at 100wpm and a decrease of 3 sittings at 120. However, 60wpm sittings have increased by 70 and sittings at 110wpm have increased by 15.

The overall pass rate was 33 per cent compared to 32 per cent the previous year. The pass rate has increased by 7 per cent at 70wpm and 4 per cent at 80wpm.



The pass rate at 60wpm, 100wpm and 110wpm has slightly decreased by 1 per cent and the pass rate at 120wpm has decreased by two per cent.

The shorthand board continues to advise tutors to enter candidates for exams only when they are ready.

It is good practice for tutors to hold mock exams in order to determine the speed at which candidates are competent and confident.

We want candidates to be as well prepared as possible so that they achieve a positive outcome in the exams.

**Karen Ballam, chief examiner  
Shorthand**

# Production journalism

The production journalism examiners are pleased to see candidates have maintained the high standard of attainment throughout 2018-19 with around three quarters once again reaching gold standard level.

Of the 716 candidates who sat the exam in 2018-19, there was a 71 per cent success rate at gold standard (A-C grades). The number of candidates taking the exam was up slightly from 697 candidates in 2017-18, demonstrating that this module continues to be in demand with centres and candidates.

The gold standard pass rate was slightly down compared to 2017-18, when 78 per cent gained an A-C grade.

The greater emphasis on web editing and headline writing introduced in 2017-18 is now firmly embedded in the production journalism exam. Core skills of editing copy and headline writing remain at its heart, with candidates asked to handle a complete templated page including a test of image cropping.

This exam continues to be reviewed to ensure it remains a valid test, which is critically important in the current fast-moving digital deadline environment.

**John Dilley, chief examiner  
Production journalism**





## Sports journalism

The NCTJ sports journalism module continues to be a dynamic and vibrant option for centres.

There were 200 sittings in 2018-19, which was slightly fewer than the previous year (229). The standard across the academic year was good, with 70 per cent of candidates (154 out of 220) achieving gold standard (A-C grades).

This outcome is slightly down on 2017-18 and is mid-range compared to other subjects in the diploma. Nearly all sittings (99 per cent) produced A-E grades, which was comparable to 2017-18 (99.6 per cent).

An industry-wide review was carried out during 2018-19 to ensure the module remains current and up-to-date and the assessment continues to test the key skills for a sports reporter. In 2019-20, the exam will move onto the Cirrus online platform. The part 1 match report remains and in part 2, a preview replaces the round-up and a new sports data question is introduced. A sports journalism workshop was held on 25 October 2019, where the changes were clearly communicated and discussed with centres.

The changes made reflect contemporary industry practice and also lead to a more diverse and varied exam that candidates should feel is a challenging but fair test of their all-round sports journalism skills and knowledge.

**Simon McEnnis, chief examiner  
Sports journalism**

# Videojournalism for online

Videojournalism for online remains a popular elective module on the Diploma in Journalism qualification.

There were slightly fewer sittings of the exam in 2018-19 than the previous year, but this mirrors a similar small fall in other established elements of the diploma. This may be attributable to demographic changes and is not seen as a major issue.

There was a slight drop in the overall pass rate from 97 per cent in 2017-18 to 93 per cent 2018-19. There was a concurrent fall in the number of candidates achieving the A-C gold standard.

The assessment and marking format were relatively unchanged for the 2018-19 academic year. The decision to ask candidates to provide captions for the coursework social media snippet was designed to reflect the growing trend of captioning all social video content. It was well-received and caused few problems.



There were no major concerns raised from centres about the structure of the assessment and markers continue to feel it is a suitable evaluation of candidates' ability, giving them a chance to demonstrate both journalistic and video production skills.

However, rapid developments in the use of video on social media have triggered a review of the content and assessment structure in time for the 2020-21 academic year.

**Vanessa Edwards, chief examiner  
Videojournalism for online**

# Business of magazines

The number of business of magazines exam sittings has fallen from the last academic year (100 this year, compared to 129 for 2017-18), but the number of candidates achieving gold standard has remained consistent – 84 per cent compared to 85 per cent in 2017-18.

The number of candidates passing the module with A-E grades has also remained consistent – 97 per cent compared with 98 per cent in 2017-18.

The exam is designed to ensure candidates make solid references to magazines they have studied in some detail and demonstrate knowledge of a range of magazine types.

The three questions test candidates' knowledge across the magazine sector, requiring them to carry out a SWOT



analysis, focus on launches and relaunches, compare B2B and consumer titles, look at marketing and advertising, and focus on the future of magazines and associated multimedia.

**Clare Gladstone, senior examiner  
Business of magazines**

# Business and finance

The business and finance syllabus saw just eight candidates sitting the exam in 2018-19, a drop from 13 candidates in the previous year.

Seven out of the eight candidates received grades A-C, which is equivalent to 88 per cent achieving the gold standard pass rate.

This was similar to the previous year when 92 per cent of candidates achieved the gold standard pass rate, although the numbers are quite small for comparison.

No centre delivering NCTJ-approved training has yet chosen to deliver the business and finance module as an option. The candidates sitting the exam were therefore all on a distance-learning basis.

**Steve Dyson, chief examiner  
Business and finance**

## Broadcast journalism

This year has seen a decrease in the number of candidates sitting the broadcast journalism exams. Gold standard passes have gone up in the TV news and radio news exams – TV news from 73 per cent to 86 per cent and radio news from 69 per cent to 85 per cent.

It is encouraging to see the improvement in the standard of television news and that the overall A-E pass rates for 2018-19 are consistent with the previous year.

Based on the work I have seen this year, the examinations are set at the correct level and I am satisfied with the standard of the work by candidates.

**Catherine Houlihan, chief examiner  
Broadcast journalism**

## Photography for journalists

The photography for journalists e-portfolio assessment was taken by 59 candidates in 2018-19, an increase from 32 candidates in the previous year.

43 candidates received grades A-C, which is equivalent to 73 per cent achieving the gold standard pass rate.

This was similar to the previous year when 75 per cent of candidates achieved the gold standard pass rate.

The module is designed to equip candidates with the photography skills required to produce images of publishable quality that meet industry standards.

It is also important for journalists to understand photographic practice and media law and ethics relating to the publication of images.

**Steve Phillips, chief examiner  
Photography for journalists**





## PR & communications/ introduction to PR

2018-19 was the first year for the new PR modules – PR & communications for journalists (double module) and Introduction to PR for journalists (single module). A total of 57 candidates took the examinations across both these modules.

There was a 60 per cent pass rate at gold standard (A-C grades) for the double module, but only a 38 per cent gold standard pass rate for the single module.

The chief examiner has provided support for NCTJ centres with advice on staffing and delivery of the modules. Using appropriately experienced staff to teach the PR modules is key to their successful completion. A workshop for tutors explaining the content and standards for the assessments was held in March 2019.

**Chris Rushton, chief examiner  
PR & communications and  
introduction to PR**

# Practical magazine journalism

The practical magazine journalism module was introduced in 2018-19. In its inaugural year five centres entered a total of 32 candidates for assessment. There was a 75 per cent pass rate at gold standard (A-C grades).

The module has been introduced following extensive research across the magazine industry in both consumer and B2B sectors. The feedback from this research helped shape a different type of assessment where candidates develop their own feature idea and conduct an in-depth face-to-face interview as part of coursework prior to a six-hour 'magazine day' assessment.

During the assessment – which is run under newsroom rather than exam conditions – candidates write and publish online a 1,000-word feature, together with self-generated photography, video and social media promotion.

Feedback has been positive from candidates, centres and industry, and initial indicators show there will be an increase in the numbers studying the module in 2019-20.

**John Dilley, chief examiner  
Practical magazine journalism**



# Comparative figures

## Diploma in Journalism (exam sittings) results summary 2018-19

### Total entry

Exam	Sittings	Gold standard	A-E pass rate
Essential journalism	1439	774	54%
Newspaper magazine regulation test	1330	986	74%
Public affairs	1264	808	64%
Essential media law and regulation	1343	868	65%
Court reporting	1131	745	66%
Sports journalism	220	154	70%
Production journalism	716	509	71%
Business of magazines	100	84	84%
Videojournalism for online	299	215	72%
Business and finance	8	7	88%
PR & Communications for journalists	25	15	60%
Intro to PR for journalists	32	12	38%
Practical magazine journalism	32	24	75%
Broadcast journalism - TV news	76	65	86%
Broadcast journalism - radio news	73	62	85%
Broadcast journalism - regulation	104	82	79%

### Total no. of exam sittings: 8192

With the exception of the introduction to PR for journalists module, over half of the exams marked in each module were awarded the industry gold standard of an A-C grade, with the overall majority achieving an E grade or above. In 2018-19, 66 per cent of candidates achieved the gold standard compared with 69 per cent in 2017-18. Ninety-four per cent of candidates achieved A-E grades in 2018-19, the same as in 2017-18.

## Diploma in Journalism (assessments) results summary 2018-19

Assessment	Sittings	Gold standard		A-E pass rate	
E-portfolio	931	844	91%	917	98%
Broadcast coursework	59	49	83%	56	95%
Photography e-portfolio	59	43	73%	59	100%

### Total no. of assessments: 1049

In the academic year from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019, 931 e-portfolios were submitted for assessment. Of these submissions, 91 per cent were awarded the industry gold standard of an A-C grade.

## Shorthand exams results summary 2018-19

A total of 3664 shorthand examinations have been sat (including resits) compared to 3726 exams in 2017-18, a decrease of 62 exams. The achievement figures for the year have been tabled below.

Speed wpm	Sittings	Passes	Pass rate
60	1393	527	38%
70	67	24	36%
80	721	290	40%
100	1378	330	24%
110	79	19	24%
120	26	4	15%
<b>Total number of exam sittings</b>	<b>3664</b>	<b>1194</b>	<b>33%</b>

In 2018-19, 24 per cent achieved 100wpm, compared to 25 per cent the previous year. Overall, the percentage pass rate for candidates achieving a shorthand speed of 60wpm or over increased by one percentage point from 32 per cent to 33 per cent.

## Total diploma exams and assessments in 2018-19: 12,905

## Diploma in Journalism exam results comparison 2018-19 and 2017-18

Exam	Number of sittings 2018-19	Gold standard 2018-19	A-E pass rate 2018-19	Number of sittings 2017-18	Gold standard 2017-18	A-E pass rate 2017-18	Difference in no. of sittings
Essential journalism	1439	54%	98%	1436	55%	98%	+3
Newspaper magazine regulation test	1330	74%	96%	1468	66%	95%	-138
Public affairs	1264	64%	91%	1397	64%	90%	-133
Essential media law and regulation	1343	65%	89%	1491	70%	93%	-148
Court reporting	1131	66%	90%	1222	71%	92%	-91
Sports journalism	220	70%	99%	229	74%	99.6%	-9
Production journalism	716	71%	99%	697	78%	98%	+19
Business of magazines	100	84%	97%	129	85%	98%	-29
Videojournalism for online	299	72%	93%	326	77%	97%	-27
Business and finance	8	88%	100%	13	92%	100%	-5
PR & communications for journalists	25	60%	84%	0	0%	0%	+25
Intro to PR for journalists	32	38%	88%	0	0%	0%	+32
Practical magazine journalism	32	75%	100%	0	0%	0%	+32
Broadcast journalism - TV news	76	86%	100%	124	73%	98%	-48
Broadcast journalism - radio news	73	85%	93%	143	69%	88%	-70
Broadcast journalism - regulation	104	79%	100%	130	87%	100%	-26
Broadcast journalism - overall	106	75%	100%	110	77%	99%	-4
<b>Total</b>	<b>8192</b>			<b>8805</b>			<b>-613</b>

## Diploma assessment results comparison 2018-19 and 2017-18

Assessment	Number of sittings 2018-19	Gold standard 2018-19	A-E pass rate 2018-19	Number of sittings 2017-18	Gold standard 2017-18	A-E pass rate 2017-18	Difference in no. of sittings
E-portfolio	931	91%	98%	863	88%	96%	+68
Broadcast coursework	59	83%	95%	89	88%	100%	-30
Photography e-portfolio	59	73%	100%	32	75%	100%	+27
<b>Total</b>	<b>1049</b>			<b>984</b>			<b>+65</b>

## Shorthand exam results comparison 2018-19 and 2017-18

Speed	Number of sittings 2018-19	Pass rate 2018-19	Number of sittings 2017-18	Pass rate 2017-18	Difference in no. of sittings
60wpm	1393	38%	1323	39%	+70
70wpm	67	36%	106	29%	-39
80wpm	721	40%	741	36%	-20
100wpm	1378	24%	1463	25%	-85
110wpm	79	24%	64	25%	+15
120wpm	26	15%	29	17%	-3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3664</b>		<b>3726</b>		<b>-62</b>



National Council for the  
Training of Journalists

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