

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

November 2017

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3 November 2017

In November a total of 63 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at seven centres across the country. The NQJ was awarded to 49 candidates – a pass rate of 78 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

THE MEDIA LAW AWARD (MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – £250)

Ellis Whitehouse

Maldon & Burnham Standard

An excellent all-round paper, with easy-to-follow answers and no problem areas. The second question was almost flawless and question three was sensibly discussed with well-reasoned conclusions.

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

John Asher

The Comet

John was a clear winner of the news report section. His accurate report was packed with information from the outset and delivered in an easy-to-read style, enhanced by full verbatim quotes. This candidate has an eye for delivering a hard-hitting factual report, supported with valid and interesting ideas for part B.

SOCIETY OF EDITORS' AWARD (NEWS INTERVIEW – £250)

Huw Oxburgh

Worthing Herald

This was an excellent story by Huw. He told the story with some drama. It flowed all the way through, and his use of language and colour was very good.

A well-deserved winner.

NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)

Wesley Holmes

Blackpool Gazette

An excellent logbook submission and one which was awarded maximum marks across a number of key tasks.

Judges were particularly impressed by submissions for key tasks such as inquiries, numeracy and writing to pictures, areas where, traditionally, it has proved difficult to score highly. A great logbook and a body of work which shows a candidate with an excellent grasp of all the key components needed to build an interesting and fully-rounded story.

The following candidates, listed in alphabetical order by surname, have now gained the National Qualification in Journalism.

John	Asher	<i>The Comet</i>
Neil	Athey	<i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>
Lloyd	Bent	<i>Westmorland Gazette</i>
Christopher	Binding	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Jamie	Brassington	<i>Express & Star</i>
Ned	Bristow	<i>Knutsford Guardian</i>
Robbie	Bryson	<i>Braintree & Witham Times</i>
James	Butler	<i>Worthing Herald</i>
Stacey-Lee	Christon	<i>The Northern Echo</i>
Emily	Collis	<i>Bromsgrove Advertiser</i>
Tom	Davis	<i>Kidderminster Shuttle</i>
Jonathan	Drury	<i>Shropshire Star</i>
Shona	Duthie	<i>Surrey Advertiser</i>
Katie	Feehan	<i>Thurrock Gazette</i>
Courtney	Friday	<i>Reading Chronicle</i>
Vicky	Gayle	<i>Daily Gazette</i>
Benjamin	Goddard	<i>Hereford Times</i>
Niall	Griffiths	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Lauren	Harris	<i>North Devon Journal</i>
Wesley	Holmes	<i>Blackpool Gazette</i>
Matthew	Jackson	<i>The Sentinel</i>
David	Jagger	<i>Telegraph & Argus</i>
Poppy	Kennedy	<i>The Scarborough News</i>
Chloe	Laversuch	<i>Warrington Guardian</i>
Anthony	Lewis	<i>Penarth Times</i>
Luke	May	<i>Kent on Sunday</i>
Jamie	McKenzie	<i>Aberdeen Press & Journal</i>
Alex	Metcalfe	<i>Teesdale Mercury</i>
Mary	Naylor	<i>Bury Times</i>
Liam	Norcliffe	<i>Derbyshire Times</i>
Laura	O'Callaghan	<i>Waltham Forest Guardian</i>
Huw	Oxburgh	<i>Worthing Herald</i>
James	Oxenham	<i>West Sussex County Times</i>
Thomas	Pyman	<i>Kent on Sunday</i>
Sara	Royle	<i>Westmorland Gazette</i>
Andrew	Sandelands	<i>Whitehaven News</i>
Joshua	Searle	<i>Maldon & Burnham Standard</i>
Rachel	Sloper	<i>Derby Telegraph</i>
Matt	Smart	<i>North Devon Gazette</i>
Will	Taylor	<i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>
Emily	Townsend	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>
Shruti Sheth	Trivedi	<i>Bucks Free Press</i>
Sarah	Waddington	<i>The Herald, Plymouth</i>
Jessica	Wells	<i>Wiltshire Gazette & Herald</i>
Ellis	Whitehouse	<i>Maldon & Burnham Standard</i>
Bianca	Wild	<i>Royston Crow</i>
Sam	Wildman	<i>Northamptonshire Telegraph</i>
Grace	Witherden	<i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>
Joshua	Wright	<i>Gloucestershire Gazette</i>

SUMMARY

A total of 78 per cent of trainees in the November sitting of the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) exams achieved the qualification.

Out of the 63 candidates who sat the exams, 49 were successful in all four parts – media law and practice, news report, news interview and e-logbook – achieving ‘senior journalist’ status. The pass rate of 78 per cent was 12 percentage points higher than the previous sitting in July.

There was a pass rate of 89 per cent in the media law and practice exam, down from 98 per cent in the previous sitting. The moderator said: “The knowledge and application displayed by most candidates was good and should give their editors confidence.”

The November NQJ saw a return to the 100 per cent pass rate for e-logbook, only the second since March 2015. The moderator said: “the November exam provided markers with a number of strong submissions and there were no major issues present in terms of the key tasks submitted.”

News report and news interview had lower pass rates, with 78 per cent of candidates passing these respective sections. Poor shorthand and spelling was highlighted by the moderators as the most common problems.

An outstanding performance by Wesley Holmes, of the *Blackpool Gazette*, saw him win the £250 e-logbook prize with a mark of 87 per cent.

Special congratulations also go to the other three prize winners who each receive £250: Ellis Whitehouse (*Maldon & Burnham Standard*) for media law and practice (88 per cent); John Asher (*The Comet*) for news report (72 per cent); and Huw Oxburgh (*Worthing Herald*) for news interview (68 per cent).

MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 46 candidates; 41 passed – 89 per cent

Another good set of results, although overall marks were not as high as in the previous paper. The knowledge and application displayed by most candidates was good and should give their editors confidence. One area of slight concern was that a few candidates were still referring to the old *Editors’ Code* when dealing with privacy issues. It is incumbent on all reporters to be up-to-date on the code and for editors to make sure that this is the case.

Question 1 tested what constituted defamation and a possible defence. The most obvious one in the scenario was truth, which most candidates got, but some went for public interest, which while unlikely to be the case in the circumstances, did gain some reward. Other areas tested were privacy, both legally and ethically, and the fair dealing defence in copyright.

Question 2 tested contempt and what material from a witness should be taken out and what can be left in once a case is active. Most candidates would have removed the description in case identity was an issue, but many were far too cautious over the witness’s description of the robbers being “cowardly thugs”. In this scenario an elderly woman was attacked in her own home, so it’s difficult to see how such an act could be seen in any other way and it hardly blackens the character of the yet-as-named men arrested. That said, most editors would prefer their reporter to err on the side of caution. What material should have been taken out to conform to the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992 and the reasons why was handled well by most candidates.

Question 3 saw a disappointing number of failures, 14, and nine borderline marks, which equates to 60 per cent of candidates not reaching a pass mark. One of the reasons for this could have been down to candidates not giving themselves enough time to tackle a question that needs as much thought as it does knowledge. There was more than enough evidence for this being the case. The scenario was based on a real-life scenario, male pupils complaining about the

unfairness of school rules on uniforms and a separate IPSO ruling (*Lightfoot v Leicester Mercury*) about lifting a child's comments from a social media site without obtaining permission. Clauses 2 and 6 came into play and apart from spotting them, candidates also need to discuss whether either had been breached. In *Lightfoot*, the IPSO decided they had not, but candidates were not penalised for not reaching the same conclusion as long as their arguments were sound, including being sensitive to the father's complaint while politely standing their ground.

Once again, candidates with a good writing style and a logical approach, allied to knowledge, tended to do better. A bullet-point approach when answering these questions is recommended, but candidates will not be penalised if they do not adopt this.

Examiners recommend that future candidates return to the latest edition of *Essential Law for Journalists* to brush up on defamation and contempt dangers and defences and court reporting restrictions, plus case studies. Regular visits to the IPSO adjudications and the *Editors' Code Book*, along with the Judicial Studies Board's Reporting Restrictions in the Criminal Courts, would also be helpful. Those candidates who do not attend an NQJ refresher are put at a great disadvantage.

For those of you who passed, congratulations, and for those who did not, plenty of revision, and good luck with your next attempt!

NEWS REPORT – 63 candidates; 49 passed – 78 per cent

Poor shorthand and spelling, plus a lack of understanding of how cats breed, disappointed examiners in the November news report section.

The story was about a pensioner whose cats bred so uncontrollably that he shut them away in his attic, climbing up every day to feed them and empty their litter trays. The original two pets were responsible for a colony of 49 cats and kittens in two years and were rescued by the RSPCA and Anderson Animal Trust following complaints from a neighbour about the smell, rats and flies in the garden.

One in seven of the 63 candidates mis-spelled fleas as "flees". Shorthand transcription errors included flies/fleas, mess/noise and infested/infected. These errors changed the meaning of the story and cost valuable marks.

A number of candidates overlooked the neutering aspect of the story – that all the cats and kittens would be neutered as soon as they were old enough and then re-homed, apart from the original two which would then be returned to their owner. Candidates who said *all* 49 cats would be re-homed missed the point that the owner would be getting his pair back.

Too many of the stories would have needed careful subbing in a world where journalists no longer have the benefit of a sub-editor's second eye on their work.

Shorthand is clearly an issue in today's newsrooms. The 100wpm gold standard is an absolute minimum for news journalists and needs to be maintained so that journalists can take down an accurate record of what has been said – and be able to transcribe it verbatim. The news report exam speech varies between 90 and 120wpm and it is clear that a large number of the November sitters did not have adequate shorthand.

In part B, trainees need to think practically about their answers. For breaking the story, the markers are looking for more than a generic list of how news can be broken; they want to know which aspects of the story the candidate will choose for which method.

For illustrations, the suggestions must be practical for an immediate breaking story, not ideas which will take too long to organise. In the third part – people to talk to to add value to the story – marks reflect the appropriateness of the source and the line of questioning. The key person to talk

to would be the elderly pensioner but few suggested him, instead putting forward their MP or “a” local councillor. The final section of follow-up ideas was generally well-handled with some valuable suggestions. Again, however, the cats’ owner was often overlooked.

Those who handled the paper well scored well-deserved high marks. Those who did not pass need to concentrate on their shorthand and take care with spellings at their re-sit in March.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 60 candidates; 47 passed – 78 per cent

This was a story about an accident when a young man was shot during a shooting day at a country estate. It was to test candidates’ skills at interpreting a scenario where they may not understand the procedures and shooting terms, but it is their job to make sure they understand and translate them into a compelling story for the reader.

There was no shortage of drama. The young man, Jack Blake, well-known locally and on the shoot with his father, is shot by a ‘guest’ who stepped in at the last minute, but had never been to a shoot or handled a shotgun before, even though he told the gamekeeper he understood the safety code.

There was drama and good colour from the actual shooting with the victim drifting in and out of consciousness as the gamekeeper used his scarf to stem the blood. There was a description of his horrific injuries and how surgeons said the next 24 hours were critical.

There were lots of good quotes; from his father, from Lord Wentworth the estate owner, and from the police officer.

Candidates were given the safety code of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation for guidance about the use of firearms.

It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates did grasp the facts and produced a good, readable story. However, despite the chance of a good intro – father sees his son shot etc – many went for the straightforward: “A man is fighting for his life...”

There were some silly, sloppy errors, the misspelling of Maurice – Morris.

Many did not give Jack’s full address, omitting Ashenby.

Shorthand still appears to be an issue - 12 bore became 12 ball shotgun; pellets became bullets and shrapnel.

Several candidates gave inaccurate quotes.

Some did not read their copy before submitting, losing valuable marks for those avoidable errors.

Those who passed had a readable writing style, caught the drama and had strong quotes.

LOGBOOK – 45 candidates; 45 passed – 100 per cent

The November exam provided markers with a number of strong submissions and there were no major issues present in terms of the key tasks submitted.

While we have recently amended the marking system regarding the uploading of original copy and cuttings, an issue still persists for some who do not check their logbooks thoroughly.

Candidates can maximise their marks on their logbook by simply undertaking a double-check on all copy which has been uploaded and also seek a second opinion if they are unsure.

We would advise all those undertaking the logbook to make sure that if they are unsure of anything, then in the first instance they should seek help from their editor or trainer, or contact the NCTJ and we will be happy to give advice ahead of submitting for marking.

National Qualification in Journalism - comparative figures

	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017	NOV 2017
TOTAL ENTRY	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>	<i>NQJ</i>
No of candidates	71	90	72	71	69	76	59	57	53	63
No of passes	48	65	44	43	51	59	40	41	35	49
No of failures	23	25	28	28	18	17	19	16	18	14
% passed	68	72	61	61	74	78	68	72	66	78

FIRST-TIMERS										
No of candidates	52	65	49	51	50	57	43	43	41	43
No of passes	33	49	28	33	36	45	27	33	32	36
No of failures	19	16	21	18	14	12	16	10	9	7
% passed	64	75	57	65	72	79	63	77	78	84

RE-SITS										
No of candidates	19	25	23	20	19	19	16	14	12	20
No of passes	15	16	16	10	15	14	13	8	3	13
No of failures	4	9	7	10	4	5	3	6	9	7
% passed	79	64	70	50	79	74	81	57	25	65

Analysis of figures for each exam section (first-timers and re-sits)

	NOV 2014	MAR 2015	JUL 2015	NOV 2015	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017	NOV 2017
NEWS INTERVIEW										
No of candidates	65	78	63	59	61	71	52	54	50	60
No of passes	53	63	49	43	47	60	35	42	35	47
No of failures	12	15	14	16	14	11	17	12	15	13
% passed	82	81	78	73	77	85	67	78	70	78

NEWS REPORT										
No of candidates	69	88	70	68	66	71	56	54	51	63
No of passes	47	66	45	44	52	56	40	39	34	49
No of failures	22	22	25	24	14	15	16	16	17	14
% passed	68	75	64	65	79	79	71	72	67	78

MEDIA LAW & PRACTICE										
No of candidates	61	81	61	60	59	65	49	50	48	46
No of passes	47	67	47	45	53	59	39	41	47	41
No of failures	14	14	14	15	6	6	10	12	1	5
% passed	77	83	77	75	90	91	80	82	98	89

LOGBOOK										
No of candidates	54	65	49	56	55	61	46	43	41	45
No of passes	54	65	42	53	50	58	45	42	41	45
No of failures	0	0	7	3	5	3	1	5	0	0
% passed	100	100	86	95	91	95	98	98	100	100