

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

March 2019

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8 March 2019

In March, a total of 28 candidates sat the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) at four centres. The NQJ was awarded to 16 candidates – a pass rate of 57 per cent.

AWARD WINNERS

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

Harry Taylor

Ham & High

Excellent all-round. Particularly strong on question 1, which tested sexual offences and a victim's consent to be identified, defamation, the meaning of words and identity, and confidentiality. The ethical arguments put forward in question 3, which covered the health and privacy of a politician, were well thought out. Congratulations!

ESSO AWARD (NEWS REPORT – £250)

Megan Baynes

Isle of Wight County Press

Megan wrote a compelling news story about the escaped leopard, providing a well-structured account of the animal's escape and the appeal for it to be re-captured unhurt, including a good range of key facts and background material. She also demonstrated good shorthand and included appropriate accurate quotes in the story. In part B, Megan came up with a broad range of ideas for promoting the story, finding comments to balance it, and suggested a good spread of follow-up ideas, many of which involved reader interaction.

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

Andrew McQuarrie

The Shetland Times

Andrew showed an excellent writing style which captured the drama and the reader's attention from the start. A very readable piece with some very good quotes which were well used. Congratulations!

NEWSQUEST AWARD (LOGBOOK – £250)

Thomas Seaward

Swindon Advertiser

A richly deserving winner of the logbook award and one which demonstrated a depth of talent across the wide variety of key tasks. Markers were particularly impressed with the trainees' choice, features, writing to pictures and press briefings key tasks which were consistently of a very high standard and showed great detail.

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

Megan	Baynes	<i>Isle of Wight County Press</i>
Ellena	Cruse	<i>Ilford Recorder</i>
Ciaran	Duggan	<i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>
Samuel	Ferguson	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Suzanne	Kendrick	<i>NWN Media</i>
Amanda	Kennedy	<i>DNG Media</i>
Tom	Kershaw	<i>Selby Times</i>
David	Lynch	<i>Western Telegraph</i>
Maxine	McArthur	<i>The Evening Times</i>
Andrew	McQuarrie	<i>The Shetland Times</i>
Tomos	Povey	<i>South Wales Argus</i>
Tim	Redigolo	<i>Northampton Chronicle & Echo</i>
Thomas	Seaward	<i>Swindon Advertiser</i>
Harry	Taylor	<i>Ham & High</i>
Katie	Williams	<i>Dorset Echo</i>
Thomas	Williams	<i>Oxford Mail</i>

SUMMARY

A total of 57 per cent of trainees in the March sitting of the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) achieved the qualification, a figure comparable to the pass rate achieved one year ago in March 2018.

Out of 28 candidates who sat the exams, 16 were successful in all four parts – media law and practice, news report, news interview and e-logbook – achieving ‘senior journalist’ status.

There was a pass rate of 78 per cent in the media law and practice exam, down from 81 per cent in the previous sitting in November. The moderator confirmed that most candidates did well in question 1, but that knowledge of contempt, filming in court precincts and ethical issues in question 2 needed further improvement. Question 3 produced some excellent answers, but some candidates had not given themselves enough time to answer this question fully.

The news report exam had an overall pass rate of 57 per cent. The moderator said: “Careless mistakes in part A meant that vital marks were lost in some papers....In part B of the exam the standard was much higher and candidates’ included some excellent ideas for illustrations and follow-ups.”

There was an overall pass rate of 63 per cent in the news interview exam. The moderator confirmed that whilst some candidates had understood the briefing notes and pieced together the serious violent attacks happening in the area, other candidates did not grasp the full story and covered the attack in isolation. It was pleasing to see that candidates who did score a pass mark wrote largely error-free stories which would have pleased any newsdesk.

The March NQJ saw a 100 per cent pass rate for e-logbook, the sixth in succession since July 2017. The moderator said: “A good round of submissions which showed that candidates have developed well during their period of training.”

An excellent performance by Harry Taylor, of *Ham & High*, saw him win the £250 prize for media law and practice. Special congratulations also go to the other three prize winners who each receive £250: Megan Baynes (*Isle of Wight County Press*) for news report; Thomas Seaward (*Swindon Advertiser*) for e-logbook; and Andrew McQuarrie (*The Shetland Times*) for news interview.

The March 2019 sitting of the NQJ was the last opportunity for candidates to sit the Level 5 qualification. Resit candidates will be informed of the transition arrangements for the Level 6 NQJ. For more information about the new NQJ qualification please see the NCTJ website.

MEDIA LAW AND PRACTICE – 23 candidates; 18 passed – 78 per cent

A pleasing set of papers, with few candidates failing and a couple of excellent papers.

Question 1 tested sexual offences and identity from a legal and ethical stance, defamation and the meaning of words and identity issues, and confidentiality and the public interest defence, with an element of ethics included by way of protecting confidential sources. Most candidates did well.

Question 2 had elements of contempt, filming in court precincts and ethical issues of harassment and payments to associates of criminals. Some candidates were caught out by the fact the restrictions on filming in courts or their precincts under the Criminal Justice Act 1925 still apply if the court decamps to the scene of a crime and to any vehicle that takes it there. A surprising number of candidates were not aware that an announcement of the intention to take a case to appeal did not make it active, and even if it was, an appeal court judge would not be influenced by

any backgrounder. Payment to the associates, Clause 16, also caused a problem with some candidates citing Clause 15, which is about payments to witnesses in court cases.

Question 3 produced many good answers, and in some cases excellent ones, but there was a disappointing number of failures in this question too. It appeared to examiners that some candidates had not given themselves enough time in which to work out the problems, why they existed and what to do about them; in other cases, it was either lack of knowledge or poor judgement. The question was based on an IPSO ruling on a complaint by Tory MP Sir Christopher Soames, and examiners were pleased to see one candidate refer to it. The issue was privacy, Clause 2, because it covered health, which is part of the clause. Just because an MP is described as larger than life, both physically and metaphorically, does that mean he does not have the same expectation of privacy as the rest of us? In part A he did, but in part B probably not; there was an issue of public interest because of his hypocrisy.

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. Both *HoldtheFrontPage* and *Press Gazette* cover the more important IPSO rulings and have regular law and ethics articles. 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! The new Level 6 media law and ethics in practice examination will be similar in structure to the Level 5 exam, but with an extra question – a greater depth of law and ethics will be tested.

NEWS REPORT – 28 candidates; 16 passed – 57 per cent

The news report exam detailed a story of a rare snow leopard that escaped from Moorhills Wildlife Park following storm force winds which damaged fencing on its enclosure.

Careless mistakes in part A meant that vital marks were lost in some papers. For example, the snow leopard's name was given in the candidate brief, but not all candidates quoted the name correctly in their reports. Overall problems with accuracy left some candidates at a disadvantage.

The required standard of shorthand was lacking and not all candidates demonstrated shorthand which was capable of coping with the 90-120wpm speech. Shorthand is a vital skill for a journalist and should not be underestimated.

There were some papers which demonstrated clumsy writing with awkward or misleading sentences and lack of structure. In part B of the exam the standard was much higher and candidates included some excellent ideas for illustrations and follow-ups.

The same good journalism practices and standards will apply to the big news story, which launches in July, and trainees must concentrate on their key skills in the coming months.

Congratulations to the journalists who passed the March 2019 exams and examiners hope they have long and memorable careers.

NEWS INTERVIEW – 27 candidates; 17 passed – 63 per cent

This was a topical story in light of the rise in the number of stabbings hitting the headlines at the time of the exam.

In this story, an innocent man is knifed through the heart by a gang member as he tried to stop his car being stolen. Architect and rugby player Joseph Archer and his girlfriend were in bed when his car alarm went off. He ran out of the house in his pyjamas followed by his girlfriend who heard the gang member demanding the keys and telling Joseph not to 'mess with the B-team'. When Joseph told him to 'go to hell', he was stabbed with an eight-inch hunting type knife.

As he lay dying, his girlfriend cradled him in her arms and told him she loved him. Listening to the 'heart-breaking' words was a neighbour and nurse who desperately tried to stem the blood from Joseph's wound with a blanket.

The stabbing was one of a series of serious violent attacks in the area, which were chronicled in the background brief. This, coupled with the rivalry between the two gangs terrorising the area, and the strong, emotional quotes from the girlfriend and the nurse, made for a rounded, dramatic story.

Some candidates had understood the briefing notes and pieced together the serious violent attacks happening in the area. They also acknowledged the rivalry between the two gangs on the estate. Unfortunately, other candidates failed to grasp the rounded story and covered the attack in isolation.

Some stories were formulaic and read as a series of facts and details on the page, with a lack of drama. Story structure was an issue for some candidates, who did not mention the girlfriend until more than halfway through the piece. Others left out the basics – the name of the nurse, her quotes. Some candidates' writing evidenced a weak structure and did not highlight the drama.

Attempts by the police and the local MP to stem the rise in the violence were dismissed in one line by many candidates. There were some good intros, but some stuck to the unimaginative: "A police investigation...."

Shorthand again appeared to be an issue with evidence of partial quotes, errors in details and missing facts. However, it was pleasing to see that the candidates who did score a pass mark, wrote largely error-free stories which would have pleased any newsdesk.

LOGBOOK – 20 candidates; 20 passed – 100 per cent

A good round of submissions overall which showed that candidates have developed well during their period of training. It has been noted, however, that some of those who submitted logbooks struggled to both complete entries in the correct key tasks and also take care to avoid duplication of submissions. Extra checks of content are always advised.

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

National Qualification in Journalism - comparative figures

	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017	NOV 2017	MAR 2018	JUL 2018	NOV 2018	MAR 2019
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	69	76	59	57	53	63	42	36	33	28
No of passes	51	59	40	41	35	49	23	17	25	16
No of failures	18	17	19	16	18	14	19	19	8	12
% passed	74	78	68	72	66	78	55	47	76	57

FIRST-TIMERS										
No of candidates	50	57	43	43	41	43	33	23	15	20
No of passes	36	45	27	33	32	36	19	13	10	12
No of failures	14	12	16	10	9	7	14	10	5	8
% passed	72	79	63	77	78	84	58	57	67	60

RE-SITS										
No of candidates	19	19	16	14	12	20	9	13	18	8
No of passes	15	14	13	8	3	13	4	4	15	4
No of failures	4	5	3	6	9	7	5	9	3	4
% passed	79	74	81	57	25	65	44	31	83	50

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

	MAR 2016	JUL 2016	NOV 2016	MAR 2017	JUL 2017	NOV 2017	MAR 2018	JUL 2018	NOV 2018	MAR 2019
NEWS INTERVIEW										
No of candidates	61	71	52	54	50	60	42	32	28	27
No of passes	47	60	35	42	35	47	27	19	20	17
No of failures	14	11	17	12	15	13	15	13	8	10
% passed	77	85	67	78	70	78	64	59	71	63

NEWS REPORT										
No of candidates	66	71	56	54	51	63	42	36	32	28
No of passes	52	56	40	39	34	49	23	17	25	16
No of failures	14	15	16	16	17	14	19	19	7	12
% passed	79	79	71	72	67	78	55	47	78	57

MEDIA LAW & PRACTICE										
No of candidates	59	65	49	50	48	46	37	30	21	23
No of passes	53	59	39	41	47	41	24	23	17	18
No of failures	6	6	10	12	1	5	13	7	4	5
% passed	90	91	80	82	98	89	65	77	81	78

LOGBOOK										
No of candidates	55	61	46	43	41	45	33	22	15	20
No of passes	50	58	45	42	41	45	33	22	15	20
No of failures	5	3	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
% passed	91	95	98	98	100	100	100	100	100	100