

NCTJ contingency plan: coronavirus

As a recognised awarding organisation, the NCTJ has written contingency arrangements and procedures in place to prepare staff in the event of extended service outages caused by factors beyond our control and to help enable us restore services in the minimum timeframe. We also have a contingency policy and communications plan in place to ensure our centres and candidates are informed about our contingency plans and arrangements.

In light of the recent coronavirus pandemic, the NCTJ has put in place the following contingency plan in consultation with our stakeholders to ensure that disruption to NCTJ exams or assessments is minimised as much as possible. The NCTJ is committed to ensuring the safety of its stakeholders and to upholding the interests of its centres and candidates and the integrity of its exams and assessments. The below contingency arrangements are designed to ensure centres and candidates are not unfairly disadvantaged by disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

When it is possible to hold exams in the future, centres and newspaper offices should ensure they follow the latest guidance from the World Health Organisation and Public Health England.

It is the NCTJ's objective to be as flexible as is possible and reasonable in the implementation of this plan to meet the needs of centres and candidates. Centres/ candidates who feel they may be eligible for a special consideration but whose circumstances fall outside of the below arrangements should contact the NCTJ directly.

The NCTJ is taking all reasonable steps to try to mitigate any adverse effect, in relation to our qualifications, arising from any disruption to our exams/assessments. As the coronavirus pandemic is an evolving situation this contingency plan will be updated as required.

Certificate in Foundation Journalism

Arrangements for centres running an approved CFJ course:

- If the completion of CFJ assessments is disrupted as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the NCTJ will agree a new course end date with the centre to ensure certification timeframes are met
- If an individual candidate is unable to complete a CFJ assessment as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which impacts on their completion of the qualification, the NCTJ will agree a new course end date with the centre to accommodate delayed submissions

Arrangements for distance learners:

- The NCTJ has the following upcoming submission deadlines in 2020 for CFJ distance learners: 26 June, 25 September and 18 December. These submission dates currently remain in place. If there are any changes to this we will advise distance learners accordingly
- If an individual candidate is unable to complete a CFJ assessment for an upcoming submission deadline as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which impacts on their completion of the qualification, the NCTJ will agree a new submission date with the candidate to ensure they are not disadvantaged

Diploma in Journalism

Arrangements for centres running accredited courses and apprenticeship training providers:

- The NCTJ has taken the decision to postpone all diploma exams in April, including shorthand exams. All centres who had booked for exam dates in April will have been contacted by the NCTJ to arrange a deferral at no additional cost. The NCTJ will offer additional exam dates in August which will be published with the NCTJ's exams calendar for the 2020-21 academic year
- The NCTJ will review the guidance issued by the government in the coming weeks to decide whether NCTJ exams will go ahead in May, and thereafter in June and July
- A special consideration will be given for any individual candidate who is unable to take their exam/assessment due to symptoms of COVID-19 or because government advice is for them to self-isolate in their specific circumstances. This will allow the candidate to defer their exam to another date in the NCTJ exams calendar at no additional cost
- If a centre is unable to host an exam or if the exam date is postponed by the NCTJ, a special consideration will be given to the full candidate cohort to allow the centre to defer the exam/assessment to another date in the NCTJ exams calendar at no additional cost
- If there are no suitable exam dates available in the NCTJ exams calendar for a deferral the NCTJ will, where possible and reasonable, arrange an alternative exam date to ensure no candidates are unfairly disadvantaged. Any postponed exams will be rescheduled as additional dates in the exams calendar
- If deferred exams or e-portfolio submissions fall outside of the centre's course end date, the NCTJ will agree a new course end date with the centre to ensure certification timeframes are met and that the results for these exams/assessments are included in the NCTJ's 2019-20 centre results tables
- If candidate work placements are cancelled as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which impacts on a candidate's completion of the Diploma in Journalism e-portfolio, the NCTJ can agree a new course end date with the centre to accommodate delayed submissions. Please note that the work placement requirement of 10 days is a recommendation and not mandatory, so it can be relaxed for students whose upcoming work placements have been cancelled

Arrangements for candidates sitting NCTJ national exams:

- The NCTJ has taken the decision to postpone all exams in April for national candidates, including in office sittings. The NCTJ will rearrange these exams to a date later in the NCTJ exams calendar, and your exam sitting will be deferred to this time. The NCTJ will contact all affected candidates once rescheduled dates are available
- The NCTJ will review the guidance issued by the government in the coming weeks to decide whether NCTJ national exams will go ahead in May, and thereafter national exams in July
- A special consideration will be given for any individual candidate who is unable to take their exam/assessment due to symptoms of COVID-19 or because government advice is for them to self-isolate in their specific circumstances. This will allow the candidate to defer their exam to another date in the NCTJ exams calendar at no additional cost

- In the event an exam cannot go ahead or is postponed by the NCTJ, a special consideration will be granted to all candidates affected to allow them to defer their exam to a future date at no additional cost. The NCTJ will, where possible and reasonable, arrange an alternative exam date for the relevant subject to ensure no candidates are unfairly disadvantaged

Additional arrangements for all Diploma in Journalism candidates:

- The NCTJ has issued guidance for centres and candidates on temporary adaptations we have made to the essential journalism e-portfolio, photography portfolio and video coursework assessments, which are designed to ensure candidates are not unfairly disadvantaged by the disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic – this guidance is available in the tutor and student resources login areas of the NCTJ website
- A special consideration will be given for any candidate who is unable to meet the requirement to conduct face-to-face interviews for the Diploma in Journalism practical magazine journalism assessment. Where a special consideration is granted, candidates must conduct these interviews via Skype, FaceTime or similar, or via phone

Junior Journalist Apprenticeship end-point assessments

- Assessment methods as stated in the assessment plan cannot be substituted for another assessment method. This is to ensure the end-point assessment still meets the original intent as set out in the assessment plan. Authority to change an assessment method(s) remains with IFATE
- The end-point assessment for the junior journalist standard is made up of a work-related project and a qualities and behaviours assessment, both of which can be conducted remotely. The qualities and behaviours assessment can be conducted via Skype, FaceTime or similar, or via phone. Training providers/employers do not need to request a special consideration for this
- Guidance on what evidence is admissible for the work-related project may be adapted to ensure no apprentices are unfairly disadvantaged – please contact the NCTJ directly for more details
- If the completion of the work-related project is disrupted as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the NCTJ will agree a break in learning with the training provider/employer of up to 12 weeks to allow the end-point assessment to be rescheduled and to ensure certification timeframes are met
- If an individual apprentice is affected by exam disruption as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which impacts on their completion of the gateway qualification (the Diploma in Journalism), the NCTJ will agree a break in learning of up to four weeks with the training provider/employer to allow gateway and the end-point assessment to be rescheduled
- The ESFA have published their apprenticeship response to the coronavirus pandemic which can be found on the gov.uk website [here](#). This response outlines the new measures being implemented by the ESFA to make it easier for apprenticeships to continue and complete in a different way if they need to or to break and resume an apprenticeship later when that becomes possible. Training providers and employers are advised to read through this guidance carefully

National Qualification in Journalism

- Currently the NQJ exams scheduled for 3 July 2020 are going ahead as planned

- For candidates that sat their NQJ exams on 6 March 2020, results were issued as planned on 7 April
- The NCTJ will be issuing separate guidance for candidates on completing the e-logbook element of the NQJ during the coronavirus pandemic – candidates should contact the NCTJ directly to discuss this guidance
- A special consideration will be given for any individual candidate who is unable to take their NQJ exams in July due to symptoms of COVID-19 or because government advice is for them to self-isolate in their specific circumstances. This will allow the candidate to defer their exam to the November sitting at no additional cost
- A special consideration will be considered for any candidates who request to defer their NQJ exams from the July to the November sitting, but whose law and public affairs exam results are due to expire this summer. In these circumstances candidates will still be considered eligible to sit the NQJ exams in November

Requesting a special consideration

For the arrangements listed above to apply, centres/candidates must request a special consideration directly with the NCTJ, following the procedures detailed in the NCTJ's reasonable adjustments and special considerations policy, available on our website.

Exemptions, equivalences and recognition of prior learning

Because the Diploma in Journalism and NQJ are designed to assess occupational competence, the NCTJ will not follow a policy of estimating grades for these qualifications. This includes accepting exemptions, equivalences or recognised prior learning, or applying special considerations permitting the awarding of predicted grades or grades from mock assessments. This is to ensure vocational and employer requirements are met, to ensure assessments are fair across all candidates, to maintain the integrity of NCTJ qualifications, and to uphold the industry standard in relation to current journalism practice.

NCTJ's responsibilities

If an alternative exam date is arranged, the NCTJ will be responsible for deciding the date and time of the re-arranged exam in consultation with centres. The NCTJ will not consider requests from centres for on demand examination dates.

The NCTJ will be responsible for communicating any changes to timetabled exams/assessments to centres, national candidates, and NCTJ examiners.

The NCTJ will notify the relevant regulators if the cancellation of an NCTJ exam or assessment has an adverse effect on candidates, standards or public confidence.

The NCTJ will coordinate with the relevant regulators where the disruption has an impact on multiple centres or a wide range of learners.

Centres' responsibilities

Apprenticeship training providers and centres running NCTJ-accredited courses will be responsible for communicating any changes to timetabled exams/assessments and course end dates to candidates/apprentices on course at their centre and to centre tutors responsible for assessing NCTJ exams. Centres must also advise their candidates, where appropriate, of the opportunities to take their exam or assessment at a later date.

Guidance for centres running accredited courses and apprenticeship training providers

Centres and training providers should prepare for disruption to exams and other assessments and make sure staff are aware of these plans.

When guidance issued by the government permits, and in the absence of any instruction from the NCTJ, centres should ensure that any booked NCTJ exam or timetabled assessment takes place if it is possible to hold it. This may mean relocating to alternative premises, if feasible. Please note that NCTJ exams cannot currently be held at a candidate's home, as this would compromise the security of the assessment. Centres must discuss alternative arrangements with the NCTJ if:

- The exam or assessment cannot take place
- A candidate misses an exam or assessment due to symptoms of COVID-19 or because they have visited a category 1 country/area within 14 days of the exam taking place, or because government advice is for them to self-isolate in their specific circumstances

If a centre relocates to alternative premises, they must ensure that:

- They contact the NCTJ to inform us of the change of venue
- Where accommodation is limited, prioritise candidates whose progression will be severely delayed if they do not take their exam or timetabled assessment when planned
- Where an exam or assessment must be completed under specified conditions, such as in safe exam browser for Cirrus exams, candidates should complete the exam/assessment under those conditions (other than where any reasonable adjustments or special considerations require alternative conditions). If the alternative premises is unable to host an NCTJ Cirrus exam using the safe exam browser software, centres must contact the NCTJ directly to discuss alternative arrangements
- Candidates are informed of any changes to the exam venue
- Any exam papers (if applicable) or assessment materials are securely transported to the alternative venue

If centres are unable to accommodate deferred exam sittings or if an individual candidate is unable to sit the deferred exam in centre, the NCTJ provides national exam dates which allow candidates to sit at a centre organised by the NCTJ or in-office. The NCTJ currently offers three national exam dates per academic year. The NCTJ will consider offering additional national exam dates as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, where possible and reasonable.

The NCTJ has decided to postpone all upcoming advisory, monitoring and accreditation panel visits. The NCTJ will make arrangements with the centre to hold the visit on an alternative date. Any urgent matters will be dealt with remotely.

Meetings and events

The NCTJ has decided to postpone all upcoming face-to-face meetings and events. The NCTJ will make arrangements to hold the meeting/event on an alternative date or, where appropriate, the NCTJ may make arrangements to hold the meeting/event remotely.