

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 response to the 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 centre, centres and newspaper offices should ensure they follow the most up to date guidance from the government 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 March, 25 June and 24 September. 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:

- NCTJ diploma exams scheduled to take place in January 2021 will be going ahead as normal. The Department for Education have confirmed that external assessments for vocational qualifications scheduled in January 2021 are permitted to go ahead in-centre if a university, college or training provider chooses to safely proceed with running the assessment session. Any centres who choose not to run these assessments in-centre can opt for their candidates to sit remotely instead
- The option of remote exams will continue to be available for all diploma exams taking place this academic year, so candidates have the opportunity to sit their NCTJ exams securely at home. Remote exams are available for all diploma subjects, including shorthand
- The remote exam fee for exams sat remotely on Cirrus/Proctorio will be suspended for exams taking place in January and February, during the current lockdown period. This will be reviewed again in mid-February for exams taking place in March onwards
- The NCTJ is currently reviewing the diploma exam dates for summer 2021 in response to the lockdown announcement on 4 January. We are consulting with our stakeholders on changes to exam dates, including additional dates, and will publish an updated schedule before the end of January 2021
- A special consideration will be given for any individual candidate who is unable to take their exam/assessment for one or more of the following reasons: because they have symptoms of COVID-19; because of restrictions imposed by the current lockdown; because they are self-isolating/shielding; because government advice is for them to quarantine 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 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:

- All diploma national exams in April/May and July are scheduled to go ahead as planned. The NCTJ is intending to deliver these exams remotely so candidates can sit their exams securely from home, or in office if this is possible. Remote exams will

be available for all diploma subjects, including shorthand. Bookings will be open as normal

- A special consideration will be given for any individual candidate who is unable to take their exam/assessment for one or more of the following reasons: because they have symptoms of COVID-19; because of restrictions imposed by the current lockdown; because they are self-isolating/shielding; because government advice is for them to quarantine 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:

- Documents required for remote exam sittings, including centre and candidate instructions and FAQs, are available on the NCTJ website in tutor, admin contact and student resources. If you have questions about sitting exams remotely, please contact the NCTJ exams team directly on info@nctj.com
- The NCTJ has issued temporary adaptations to the essential journalism e-portfolio, photography portfolio and video/TV coursework assessments, which are designed to ensure candidates who continue to be affected by coronavirus restrictions are not unfairly disadvantaged. These adaptations have now been extended until September 2021 and are available in the tutor and student login areas of the NCTJ website. If candidates wish to make use of these temporary adaptations for portfolios/coursework due for submission in the 2020-21 academic year, they must request a special consideration with the NCTJ directly
- 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 follow the guidance and temporary flexibilities issued by the ESFA 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 follow the guidance and temporary flexibilities issued by the ESFA to allow gateway and the end-point assessment to be rescheduled
- For more information on the guidance and temporary flexibilities issued by the ESFA in response to the coronavirus pandemic, please click [here](#). Training providers and employers are advised to read through this guidance carefully

National Qualification in Journalism

- Currently the NQJ exams scheduled for 5 March 2021 are going ahead as planned. The NCTJ is intending to deliver the NQJ exams on 5 March remotely so candidates can sit their exams securely at home, or in office if this is possible. We will be in touch with NQJ candidates enrolled for the March exams and their editors nearer the time with further details
- If candidates have difficulty completing the e-logbook element of the NQJ because of coronavirus restrictions, they should contact the NCTJ directly to discuss this
- A special consideration will be given for any individual candidate who is unable to take NQJ exams in March for one or more of the following reasons: because they have symptoms of COVID-19; because of restrictions imposed by the current lockdown; because they are self-isolating/shielding; because government advice is for them to quarantine 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
- A special consideration will be considered for any candidates who request to defer their NQJ exams from the March to the July sitting, but whose law and public affairs exam results are due to expire in the spring. In these circumstances candidates will still be considered eligible to sit the NQJ exams in July

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 [here](#).

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 reducing the content of these qualifications or their assessments, and 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 assessment adaptations and changes to timetabled exams/assessments to centres, national candidates, and NCTJ examiners.

The NCTJ will inform the relevant regulators about assessment adaptations and 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 assessment adaptations, and changes to timetabled exams/assessments and course end dates to candidates/apprentices on course at their centre and to centre tutors responsible for marking 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 ensure they are prepared for disruption to exams and other assessments and make sure staff are aware of these plans.

Where 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 in-centre if it is possible to hold it. This may mean relocating to alternative premises, if feasible. 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 the current lockdown, symptoms of COVID-19, because they are self-isolating/shielding, or because government advice is for them to quarantine 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 who are unable to sit exams remotely and/or 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 remotely or in-centre, the NCTJ provides national exam dates which allow candidates to sit in-office or remotely from home. The NCTJ currently offers three national exam dates per academic year.

NCTJ accreditation

The NCTJ is committed to supporting all centres running accredited courses while they are rescheduling and delivering exams remotely and have moved to remote learning and teaching. The NCTJ will be conducting advisory, monitoring and accreditation panel visits remotely until further notice, for centres that require support. Urgent matters will continue to be dealt with remotely. The NCTJ will hold meetings and events remotely, where appropriate. Student council events for apprentices and candidates on accredited courses have been scheduled to take place remotely, starting in February 2021.

We will be scheduling a series of webinars in 2021 to support our centres during the current lockdown, starting with a webinar to discuss our contingency arrangements which will be held in late January 2021. The NCTJ's accreditation manager will be in touch with centres directly with further details.

Any centres that have concerns about upcoming accreditation deadlines should contact the NCTJ's accreditation manager directly to discuss this. The NCTJ aims to be as flexible as possible regarding requests for extended deadlines to ensure all centres are fully supported.