

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 communications plan in place to ensure our centres and candidates are informed about our contingency plans and arrangements.

In light of the recent coronavirus outbreak, the NCTJ has put in place the following contingency plan in consultation with our stakeholders in the event that NCTJ exams or timetabled assessments are seriously disrupted. 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 any disruption caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

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.

In the event of a disruption to NCTJ exams/assessments, the NCTJ will take all reasonable steps to mitigate any adverse effect, in relation to our qualifications, arising from the disruption. As the coronavirus outbreak is an evolving situation this contingency plan will be updated as required.

Arrangements for centres running accredited courses and apprenticeship training providers

- The NCTJ has considered the revised guidance issued by the government on 16 March. We understand that individual centres may be making their own arrangements in light of the revised guidance from the government. If these arrangements include the decision not to run an upcoming NCTJ exam, centres should follow the arrangements given below to arrange a special consideration.
- 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 they have visited a category 1 country/area within 14 days of the exam date, 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 the centre is unable to host an exam due to a centre closure (or other reason) and is unable to source an alternative venue, 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 (or if the remaining dates in the calendar fall after the centre's course end date) the NCTJ will, where possible and reasonable, arrange an alternative exam date to ensure no candidates are unfairly disadvantaged. For example, we may decide to run additional diploma exams in August and/or September/October, including additional shorthand exams
- 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 outbreak which impacts on a candidate's completion of the Diploma in Journalism e-portfolio, the NCTJ will agree a new course end date with the centre to accommodate delayed submissions

Arrangements for candidates sitting NCTJ national exams

- The NCTJ has considered the revised guidance issued by the government on 16 March and has taken the decision to postpone exams in April 2020 for national candidates who have elected to sit at an NCTJ exam centre. Exams in April 2020 for national candidates who have elected to sit in office can still take place, but we understand that newspaper offices may be making their own arrangements in light of the revised guidance from the government. If these arrangements include the decision not to host an upcoming NCTJ national exam, affected candidates should contact the NCTJ directly to arrange a special consideration.
- 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 they have visited a category 1 country/area within 14 days of the exam date, 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 the NCTJ is unable to host a national exam due to a centre closure, the NCTJ will, where possible, make arrangements to hold the exam at an alternative venue on the date specified
- In the event the exam cannot go ahead, 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 candidates

- 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 e-portfolio and practical magazine journalism assessments. Where a special consideration is granted, candidates must conduct these interviews via Skype, FaceTime or via phone
- A special consideration will be considered for any candidates unable to meet the requirements of the Diploma in Journalism photography e-portfolio. Centres/candidates should contact the NCTJ directly to discuss their concerns and the special consideration required

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

The NCTJ does not accept exemptions, equivalences or recognised prior learning for any part of its qualifications. The NCTJ will not apply special considerations permitting the awarding of predicted grades or mock assessments, the substitution of exams for another type of assessment, or any adjustment to marking standards. 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 to candidates 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 should prepare for possible disruption to exams and other assessments and make sure staff are aware of these plans.

In the absence of any instruction from the NCTJ, centres should ensure that any 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 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 may consider offering additional national exam dates as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, where possible and reasonable.

The NCTJ has considered the revised guidance issued by the government on 16 March and has made the decision 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 considered the revised guidance issued by the government on 16 March and has made the decision 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.