

# National Qualification in Journalism

## Examiners' Report

August 2020



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This examiners' report covers the sittings of the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) in 2019-20 (November 2019, March 2020 and July 2020).

Across the 2019-20 academic year, a total of 84 candidates sat the exams for the NQJ. Over the three sittings, a total of 59 candidates achieved the qualification, a pass rate of 70 per cent.

The next examiners' report is due to be published in August 2021 and will cover the NQJ sittings in November 2020, March 2021 and July 2021.



# Award winners 2019-20

The award winners listed below have been selected from the candidates who sat the NQJ in November 2019, March 2020 and July 2020.

## Media law and ethics in practice award, sponsored by Reviewed & Cleared - £750

Conor Matchett, *Edinburgh Evening News*

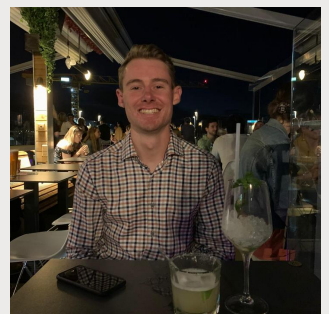
Conor Matchett (90%). This exceptional script, which showed excellent knowledge and application, thoroughly deserves to win the media law and ethics in practice award for the best exam in the past three examinations. Conor's clear and concise answers made marking easy. His answers in section 1 were perfect and his approach to the ethical problems in section 4, which many candidates found difficult, was analytical and spot on. Congratulations!



## Practical journalism skills award, sponsored by Esso - £750

James Roberts, *Oxford Mail*

James Roberts (80%). James had a steady, professional approach to tackling the fracking party celebrations in his big news story exam. He competently reported the story from initial tip-off to final mystery death, showing he understood the importance of liaising with colleagues, taking health and safety considerations into account, managing staff, reacting to social media responses and producing an excellent news story in question 10 that summed up the situation with facts, colour and quotes. Overall James demonstrated skills across the board as a journalist and richly deserves this award.



## E-logbook award, sponsored by Newsquest - £750

Ross Hanvidge, *Helensburgh Advertiser*

Ross Hanvidge (80%). This was an excellent logbook which gained high marks due to a number of impressive elements. The opening stories were both skilfully crafted and set the tone for this submission, while a strong marketplace/community key task was also recorded. The examiners were also impressed with strong use of captions in the video journalism category – overall a worthy winner of this award.



**From the sittings in November 2019, March 2020 and July 2020, the following candidates have now gained the National Qualification in Journalism:**

|             |               |   |
|-------------|---------------|---|
| James       | Averill       | <i>Northampton Chronicle &amp; Echo</i>       |
| Thomas      | Bamford       | <i>The Bucks Herald</i>                       |
| Dan         | Barker        | <i>Newmarket Journal</i>                      |
| Samual      | Beamish       | <i>Dorset Echo</i>                            |
| Kieran      | Bell          | <i>Maidenhead Advertiser</i>                  |
| Daniel      | Bennett       | <i>Archant London</i>                         |
| Thomas      | Chapman       | <i>Eastern Daily Press</i>                    |
| Sophie-May  | Clarke        | <i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>                   |
| Jacob       | Colley        | <i>Cumberland News</i>                        |
| Lucas       | Cumiskey      | <i>Archant North London</i>                   |
| Sam         | Dixon-French  | <i>West Sussex County Times</i>               |
| Amy         | Farnworth     | <i>Lancashire Telegraph</i>                   |
| Jessica     | Farrington    | <i>Warrington Guardian</i>                    |
| Axel        | Fithen        | <i>Henley Standard</i>                        |
| Olivia      | Gantzer       | <i>Reading Chronicle</i>                      |
| David       | George        | <i>The News, Portsmouth</i>                   |
| Holly       | Gittins       | <i>The Wakefield Express</i>                  |
| Ross        | Hanvidge      | <i>Helensburgh Advertiser</i>                 |
| Ben         | Hardy         | <i>Lynn News, Iliffe Media</i>                |
| Jack        | Haugh         | <i>The Gazette</i>                            |
| Peter       | Hennessy      | <i>Lincolnshire Live</i>                      |
| Katherine   | Heslop        | <i>Saffron Walden Reporter</i>                |
| John        | Holden        | <i>Worthing Herald</i>                        |
| Will        | Jefford       | <i>Ipswich Star</i>                           |
| Charley-Kai | John          | <i>Shetland Times</i>                         |
| Harrison    | Jones         | <i>Metro</i>                                  |
| Priya       | Kingsley-Adam | <i>Suffolk Free Press</i>                     |
| Josie       | Le Vay        | <i>Powys County Times</i>                     |
| Jack        | Lenton        | <i>Congleton Chronicle</i>                    |
| Jason       | Lewis         | <i>Bournemouth Echo</i>                       |
| Nathan      | Louis         | <i>Watford Observer</i>                       |
| Huw         | Mabe          | <i>Stroud News and Journal</i>                |
| Melissa     | Major         | <i>News and Star</i>                          |
| Teveye      | Markson       | <i>Reading Chronicle</i>                      |
| Conor       | Matchett      | <i>Edinburgh Evening News</i>                 |
| Seamus      | McDonnell     | <i>The Bolton News</i>                        |
| Samuel      | Morton        | <i>Chichester Observer</i>                    |
| Ismail      | Mulla         | <i>The Yorkshire Post</i>                     |
| Victoria    | Munro         | <i>East London &amp; West Sussex Guardian</i> |
| James       | Mutch         | <i>Leigh Journal</i>                          |
| Laura       | Nolan         | <i>Northern Echo</i>                          |
| Thomas      | Parkes        | <i>Express &amp; Star</i>                     |



Danielle  
Alex  
Carly  
George  
Lucy  
James  
Alex  
Oliver  
Rory  
Jack  
Ellis  
Daniel  
Jessica  
Jacob  
Joseph  
Samuele  
Maria

Poole  
Richards  
Roberts  
Roberts  
Roberts  
Roberts  
Seabrook  
Sirrell  
Smith  
Stanners  
Stephenson  
Taylor  
Taylor  
Thorburn  
Timan  
Volpe  
Zaccaro

*Dudley News*  
*Devon Live*  
*Northampton Chronicle & Echo*  
*Maidenhead Advertiser*  
*Derbyshire Times*  
*Oxford Mail*  
*Reading Chronicle*  
*The Reading Chronicle*  
*Shropshire Star*  
*Alloa and Hillfoots Advertiser*  
*Sheerness Times Guardian*  
*The Mail*  
Bauer Media  
*The Comet*  
*The Bolton News*  
Archant North London  
*Southern Daily Echo*



# Chief examiner's summary

Across the 2019-20 academic year, a total of 84 candidates sat the exams for the Level 6 NQJ. Over the three sittings (in November 2019, March 2020 and July 2020), a total of 70 per cent of trainees achieved the qualification.

Across the three sittings in 2019-20, there was an overall pass rate of 75 per cent in the media law and ethics in practice exam. The practical journalism skills exam (big news story) had an overall pass rate of 85 per cent, and there was an overall pass rate of 97 per cent for the e-logbook.

An excellent performance by Conor Matchett, of the Edinburgh Evening News, in the March sitting of the qualification saw him win the £750 prize for media law and ethics in practice. Special congratulations also go to the other two prize winners who each receive £750: James Roberts, of the Oxford Mail, for the practical journalism skills exam (big news story); and Ross Hanvidge, of the Helensburgh Advertiser, for e-logbook.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought immense challenges for everyone and that applies to trainee journalists most especially. The difficulties of working from home in lockdown and covering this huge and unprecedented story without the close support network of the newsroom, has meant a steep learning curve for many so early in their careers. For those taking the NQJ at the same time, there has been an extra dimension to these challenges.

So I would like to pay tribute to all those who undertook the NQJ in July and offer my congratulations to all those who achieved the qualification in 2019-20. The pass rate is a huge credit to their hard work and dedication. I also offer lots of encouragement to those who just missed out. Your time will come soon.

Because of the lockdown restrictions, the NQJ exams were successfully delivered remotely in July with candidates able to sit them securely at home. As well as being a tribute to the candidates, it is also a huge tribute to the team at the NCTJ who worked incredibly hard behind the scenes to ensure the NQJ could go ahead smoothly, efficiently and with integrity. My heartfelt thanks to them for this fantastic effort.

As I have said previously, the new look NQJ accurately reflects daily life, pressures and demands of the profession, even in the context of the world rapidly changing around us.

The assessments are an exercise in compelling and accurate storytelling and having an in-depth understanding of the news gathering process, as well as a test of the legal and ethical challenges that journalists increasingly face every day.

In the light of a turbulent and frankly astonishing few months, we can be as confident as ever that the NQJ gives today's journalists the very best and most relevant platform upon which to build their career, equipping them for roles that have never been more vital for our communities and our democracy.

**Andy Martin, chief examiner, National Qualification in Journalism**

# Media law and ethics in practice

79 candidates; 59 passed - 75 per cent

To have the best chance of passing this exam candidates must have good law knowledge and understanding of ethics, but that is not enough if you cannot apply that to the questions.

Although candidates can take a copy of *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists* with them, they must be comfortable with its contents because there is little time to study it in detail during the exam. It is not enough to quote the relevant statutes and codes; candidates must also be able to relate them to what the question is asking.

Section four requires candidates to think about how ethics affect their jobs. There are not necessarily right or wrong answers, but candidates must be able to explain their thinking clearly so that examiners can see why they have come to the conclusions they have made. This section needs time and it is evident in some cases that candidates have not taken sufficient time to answer the question properly.

It requires more than just identifying the clauses; candidates must also apply them to the scenario and explain why. All too often a lack of application has reduced marks. Candidates should not forget to discuss public interest.

## **Exam summary: November 2019**

Section 1 was generally well-answered, but a few candidates did not know that that an official report issued by a council on the matter of public interest requires the right of reply, if requested, from anyone defamed in the report.

This is worrying as official statements from councils are a staple diet for journalists. However, there were some strong answers on Clause 10 and why there was public interest in allowing it to be breached.

Section 2 was also well-answered in the main. A few candidates did not know discretionary power to give a witness anonymity came from Section 46 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 and got it mixed up with the Contempt of Court Act 1981.

A couple of candidates thought contemporaneous reporting from court was covered by qualified privilege, but there were good answers on what requirements must be met to identify a victim of a sexual offence, or in this section a victim under the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Section 3 had elements of defamation, confidentiality, and copyright of Clause 14. There were some good answers, with everyone realising confidentiality was an issue, however some candidates did not pick up on the defamation dangers involved in publishing a leaked document nor the breach of copyright implications.

Section 4 produced some excellent answers, but as in previous examinations, it was obvious some candidates had not given themselves enough time to tackle a complex question. Examiners were looking for answers that covered Clauses 2 (Privacy), 4 (Intrusion into grief or shock) and 6 (Children), all of which were likely to have been breached without adopting the right course of action.

**Exam summary: March 2020**

In section 1 candidates needed to explain why there was no defence for publishing defamatory material taken from a press release, apart from truth, which would not work as there was nothing to back up the claims. Most candidates failed this question with many suggesting incorrectly that qualified privilege would work. Most candidates understood that qualified privilege would cover a press conference but those who said the right of reply must be offered were wrong. Most candidates knew that qualified privilege applied to handed-out material and that the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 applied to photographs on websites.

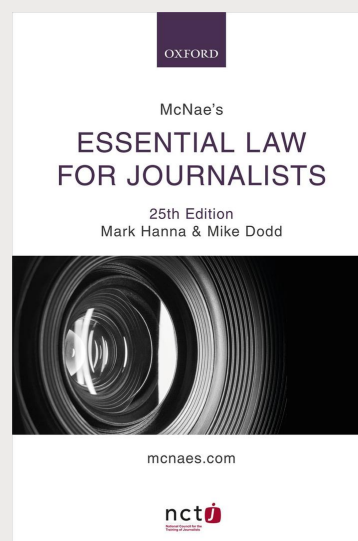
In section 2 most candidates understood the contempt dangers once a case had become active and what material might cause a substantial risk of serious prejudice or impediment. The Section 3 defence of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 was covered well by most candidates. Most candidates knew how Section 52a of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 affects reports of preliminary hearings at magistrates' courts.

Section 3 saw some good answers on privacy laws and defences available to the media. Most candidates understood the dangers under Clause 6 of interviewing schoolchildren with the correct permission. Question 10 required candidates to analyse a court report to spot numerous legal and ethical pitfalls. The report would have to be amended to conform to the requirements of absolute privilege along with the Sexual Offences (amendment) Act 1992. There was also the danger of breaching Clauses 7 and 11 of the Editors' Code. Few candidates spotted all the dangers.

In section 4 a number of candidates ran out of time and did not attempt to answer the question. The question covered Clause 11 (victims of sexual assault) and how that could be breached not only in writing a story, but also in researching it by interviewing third parties. Clauses 2 (privacy) and 3 (harassment) could also have come into play, along with 4 (intrusion into grief or shock) and 6 (children).

**Exam summary: July 2020**

Section 1 was generally well-answered, with candidate picking up on the dangers of using material before checks had been made on whether relatives and friends had been informed. Question 3, copyright application, was generally good, but some candidates were unaware that fair dealing covers video. Question 4 covered section 46 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 – the majority of candidates understood the circumstance when this could be used, but some got it confused with Section 11 of the Contempt of Court Act.





Section 2 covered the danger of breaching the Criminal Justice Act by taking photographs in and around court and Section 9 of the Contempt of Court Act by audio recording in the court room – these questions were well answered. Question 7 explored honest opinion to defend a columnist criticising a judge over a lenient sentence. Most candidates gained full marks for this question, which was good to see as journalists are being required to write more opinion pieces.

In section 3, several candidates failed to read Question 8 properly or were unaware of the automatic Section 49 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 reporting restrictions that apply in youth courts. Instead, they went for the discretionary Section 45 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 used in adult court.

Most candidates knew that Clause 8 applied when seeking to interview hospital patients and that there were also privacy issues. Most candidates also realised that reporting was restricted by Section 52a of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the reasons why. In Question 11, the majority of candidates understood why the defendant's girlfriend was "genuinely relevant" to the case and therefore she could be identified in reports which breach Clause 9 of the Editors' Code.

Section 4 centred on privacy, whether under Clause 2 or Clause 6 (v), and who had a reasonable expectation of privacy. Everyone had it in the circumstances except the politician, where the public interest over-ride would kick in as it would expose her hypocrisy. This question produced some excellent, well-argued answers.

**Crispin Clark, chief moderator  
Media law and ethics in practice**



# Practical journalism skills - big news story

68 candidates; 58 passed - 85 per cent

The big news story is designed to test a trainee's readiness for senior responsibility in the newsroom. It involves covering a fast-paced story for modern-day publication across all sectors of the media – print, web, social media, TV or radio and requires the trainee to be able to adapt to changing circumstances as well as being mindful of everyday necessities.

In each of the three sittings, the story developed through timed releases and additional information, in the same way a major story would be covered in the newsroom. This proved to be a challenge technically for the July exam because remote invigilation software was used instead of live invigilators. But the adaptation was successfully implemented and candidates were provided with clear instructions for safely accessing the additional material at appropriate times without compromising the exam.

Generally, trainees have taken the exam in their stride and demonstrated professionalism and expertise across the board. But they should remember the key principles of journalism and law which they will face in their day-to-day work.

There is no set format for the big news story exam and aspects will change from exam to exam to keep candidates on their toes. Some exams require health and safety knowledge and others ask for the candidates to describe how they would inform colleagues throughout their media group. The information sought in the exams will be pertinent to the topic of the story.



## *Exam summary: November 2019*

In November, the exam featured a huge anti-fracking celebration party planned by South Torside Against Fracking Forever (STAFF), which began with plans for 2,000 protesters to meet up at the now closed Byron Lane fracking site operated by Parham Oil and Gas. As the story unfolded the numbers rose to in excess of 3,000 and the guests included a Hollywood film star, actors and politicians

This was a major event and candidates needed to understand the implications of trying to cover a gathering of over 3,000 people. Health and safety considerations formed one of the questions and overall, candidates handled this well.

Suggested hashtags let some candidates down. Examples of #party, #celebration and #fracking would be unlikely to direct the Twitter community to the specific action at South Torside. Facebook was not always used to best effect to encourage people to make contact with information. In a gathering as large as this, the media group would be heavily dependent on people tweeting from the party to gather information and images.

**Exam summary: March 2020**

In March, the exam scenario featured bogus water board officials who were gaining entry to homes on the pretext of checking water supplies in order to steal money. The situation escalated as the thieves became more brazen, taking a retired teacher's entire pension fund causing her to have a near-fatal heart attack, and other residents being injured. Police declared a major incident and eventually found the culprits were illegal immigrants living on a nearby farm.

Many trainees tripped up over the bogus water officials and referred to robbery or burglary. The offence was just theft. They also overlooked the final release which said an arrest had been made and several candidates consequently committed contempt of court with information they included in their stories.

**Exam summary: July 2020**

In July, the exam topic was torrential rain and rising floodwaters which caused the River Glenningfield to break its banks in the town of Hampton Eve. People were trapped in their homes, shops flooded, roads closed and a jeweller swept away in the floodwater needed rescuing by the Coastguard.

The overall standard across the candidates sitting in July was high. This was pleasing for the examiners who felt candidates tackled the story with a steady, competent approach.

**Faith Lee, chief moderator**  
**The big news story**







## E-Logbook

**58 candidates; 56 passed - 97 per cent**

### ***Assessment summary: November 2019***

These were good submissions and the calibre of the higher performing entries has risen markedly.

It was pleasing to see that the core fundamentals of good story-telling and writing remain strong and that candidates also have a firm grasp of the newer key task areas.

### ***Assessment summary: March 2020***

It is clear that candidates are at ease with the changes made to the key tasks for the Level 6 NQJ as evidenced by their logbook submissions for the March sitting. Story-telling across most of the key tasks proved to be strong and the new categories have clearly bedded in well with candidates providing, on the whole, some in-depth submissions.

### ***Assessment summary: July 2020***

Overall good submissions were provided in the July sitting and there were some very high calibre entries. It was disappointing to note, however, that more than one candidate failed to check the final logbook to make sure that all elements which were required were there.

The impact of coronavirus may have made it harder to keep in direct contact with trainers/editors, but it is as imperative as ever that elements such as original copies are either submitted, or that a clear reason is given for their absence.

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

**Darren Isted, chief moderator  
E-logbook**

# Results analysis

## Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism results 2019-20

The below results summary details the overall NQJ results achieved in 2019-20:

| Total entry      |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| No of candidates | 84        |
| No of passes     | 59        |
| No of failures   | 25        |
| <b>% passed</b>  | <b>70</b> |

The below results summary details the breakdown of NQJ results achieved by exam section:

| Practical skills exam |           |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| No of candidates      | 68        |
| No of passes          | 58        |
| No of failures        | 10        |
| <b>% passed</b>       | <b>85</b> |

| Media law and ethics in practice |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| No of candidates                 | 79        |
| No of passes                     | 59        |
| No of failures                   | 20        |
| <b>% passed</b>                  | <b>75</b> |

| E-logbook        |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| No of candidates | 58        |
| No of passes     | 56        |
| No of failures   | 2         |
| <b>% passed</b>  | <b>97</b> |

The below results summary details the breakdown of the overall NQJ results achieved in 2019-20 by Pass, Merit and Distinction:

|             | No of candidates | % achieved |
|-------------|------------------|------------|
| Distinction | 25               | 30         |
| Merit       | 24               | 28         |
| Pass        | 10               | 12         |





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