



NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

Examiners' Report

2023-24

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

This examiners' report covers the sittings of the Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ) in 2023-24 (November 2023, March 2024 and July 2024).

Across the 2023-24 academic year, a total of 203 candidates sat the exams for the NQJ. Of these 203 candidates, 129 were working towards the full qualification. Over the three sittings, a total of 86 candidates achieved the qualification, a pass rate of 66 per cent.

The next examiners' report is due to be published in September 2025 and will cover the NQJ sittings in November 2024, March 2025 and July 2025.

AWARD WINNERS 2023-24

The award winners listed below have been selected from the candidates who sat the NQJ in November 2023, March 2024 and July 2024.



MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE AWARD, SPONSORED BY IPSO

Thomas Hardwick, *Derby Times* (88 per cent)

This was an excellent paper in which Thomas scored consistently high marks over all four sections. He showed no weaknesses in his knowledge of the law and ethics, which he applied to the scenarios sensibly and with a lucid writing style. His final answer to the ethics question was well argued, showing an understanding of the problems and how to deal with them. Congratulations to a worthy winner.



PRACTICAL JOURNALISM SKILLS AWARD, SPONSORED BY NEWSQUEST

Daniel Hordon, *The Northern Echo* (83 per cent)

Daniel demonstrated an excellent approach to this breaking news story; his common sense, skill, insight and sharp news sense were all evident in what was an outstanding paper. The story questions attracted very high marks. Daniel's writing was well-structured, concise, engaging, and dynamic. He was careful to relate every question to the scenario at hand, which meant his answers were focused and relevant, and he clearly understood the value and strengths of the various social media channels. A well-deserved winner.



LOGBOOK AWARD, SPONSORED BY ILIFFE MEDIA

Hayley Clarke, BBC (89 per cent)

Hayley's logbook stood out because of the clarity, depth and enormous variety of subjects covered. They ranged from homelessness, post-pandemic A-level results, living with ADHD, the plight of ordinary people in economically and politically challenged Sri Lanka to an entertainingly vivid video profile of the animals and folk at Hackney City Farm! In short it was very impressive, a worthy winner.

CHIEF EXAMINER'S SUMMARY

It is a great pleasure to present my annual report on another successful, positive and encouraging year for the NQJ.

As always, I would like to offer my congratulations to everyone who has passed this rigorous, professional qualification and my encouragement to those who were not quite able to get over the line. It will come!

The results in 2023-24 have been excellent, with an overall pass rate of 66 per cent. This is made up of 69 per cent in media law and ethics in practice, 61 per cent in the practical skills exams (including the big news story) and a brilliant 100 per cent in the e-logbook – reflecting a superb standard of journalism in newsrooms up and down the country.

At this point it's worth reflecting on the pivotal role of journalism in a world of growing misinformation and disinformation.

The dangerous consequences of a global, social media-driven phenomenon are only too clear. It is even more important that the digital and printed voice of trusted, professional, trained journalists and mainstream media outlets is heard above all the other noise and distraction.

Also, more important than ever is the journalist's role of holding to account public bodies, private organisations and individuals in high office and other positions of power and providing the scrutiny that no-one else has the ability and credibility to carry out. The NQJ plays a huge part in that.

The qualification is the professional standard for our industry and rightly so.

Tireless work goes on behind the scenes at the NCTJ to ensure that the NQJ, and indeed all other qualifications, constantly evolve to reflect modern, ever-changing newsrooms and those who work in them.

We will be seeing some of that work in the NQJ next year.

So finally, my grateful thanks as ever to all the staff at the NCTJ for their dedication, relentless drive for ever higher standards and the immense help and support they give to candidates, trainers and our industry as a whole.

Andy Martin
Chief examiner, National Qualification in Journalism



The candidates listed below gained the National Qualification in Journalism in 2023-24:

Rachel Alexander	<i>Birmingham Mail</i>	Hamish Inglis	Future
Shazia Ali	Freelance	Jasmine Jackson	<i>The Bolton News</i>
Owen Arands	Bauer Media Group	Imogen James	BBC
Christopher Atkinson	<i>Hampshire Chronicle</i>	Kris Johnston	<i>Lynn News</i>
Patrick Barlow	<i>The Argus</i>	Hana Kelly	<i>The Telegraph</i>
Pamela Bilalova	BBC North East and Cumbria	Perisha Kudhail	BBC Midlands
Joanne Chapman	Bauer Media Group	Alexandra Langridge	KentOnline
Hayley Clarke	BBC	Maisie Lawton	<i>Manchester Evening News</i>
Nathan Clarke	Birmingham Live	Tom Leaman	<i>Somerset County Gazette</i>
Molly Cleary	Future	Sophie Lewis	<i>The Portsmouth News</i>
Chelsea Coates	BBC	Shereen Low	Bauer Media Group
Dylan Connell	<i>The York Press</i>	Ellis Maddison	Bauer Media Group
Phoebe Cox	National World	Alexander Marsh	<i>Islington Gazette</i>
Eleanor Crabbe	<i>The Argus</i>	Alice Marshall	Future
Jemma Cullum	<i>Wiltshire Gazette</i>	Paul McAuley	<i>Liverpool Echo</i>
Conal Cunningham	<i>St Helens Star</i>	Thames Menteth	<i>Ground Engineering magazine</i>
Maia Davies	BBC	Inaya Mohmood	BBC
Yvonne Deeney	Bristol Live	Rowan Newman	<i>Bradford Telegraph & Argus</i>
Emma Downey	<i>Lancashire Evening Post</i>	Kaia Nicholl	<i>East Anglian Daily Times</i>
Natalie Earl	Future	Isabel Oldman	<i>Bury Times</i>
Oscar Edwards	BBC Wales	Tobias Oliver	<i>Hampshire Chronicle</i>
Jordan Elkins	<i>Salisbury Journal</i>	James Pallant	KentOnline
Jacob Evans	BBC World Service	Andrea Pluck	BBC
Jack Ewing	BBC Scotland	Megan Price	Bauer Media Group
Alice Faulkner	Radio Clyde	Jose Ramos	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>
Jack Fifield	<i>The Bolton News</i>	Daniel Rees	<i>Colchester Gazette</i>
Cait Findlay	Cambridgeshire Live	Georgia Revell	<i>Bournemouth Echo</i>
Emma Fradgley	Newsquest London	Jacob Ridley	Future
Erin Gaskell	Newsquest Cumbria	Ez Roberts	BBC Panorama
Maya George	<i>Southern Daily Echo</i>	Joe Robinson	<i>The Leader</i>
Alice Gerrard	<i>Bury Times</i>	Steven Ross	South Yorkshire Police
Emily Gilbert	Bauer Media Group	Ella Rule	BBC Radio 4
Patrick Gouldsborough	<i>The Northern Echo</i>	Erin Sharrocks	BBC
Katie Green	<i>Grantham Journal</i>	Sophie Squires	Bauer Media Group
Jake Groves	<i>CAR magazine</i>	Clodagh Stenson	BBC Radio Oxford
Kirsty Hamilton	<i>Sheffield Star</i>	Gabrielle Sungailaite	BBC Business
Thomas Hardwick	<i>Derbyshire Times</i>	Lauran O'Toole	<i>Daily Express</i>
Zachary Harrison	<i>The Bolton News</i>	Sophie Wallace	BBC
Katie Hoggan	Wales Online	Josephine Watson	Future
Daniel Hordon	<i>The Northern Echo</i>	Eleanor Weaver	Bauer Media Group
Zoe Hu	Drapers	Katie Wheatley	<i>Northampton Chronicle & Echo</i>
Patrick Hughes	BBC	Luke Wilkinson	Bauer Media Group
Sanjana Idnani	BBC Wales	Joshua Wolens	Future

MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE

134 candidates; 92 passes – 69 per cent

Over the three examinations there were 134 candidates, some of whom were resits. This was an increase of 21 candidates compared to the previous academic year. Some exams had to be altered to accommodate the different programmes of study for community news reporters and Scottish candidates. There were also different papers for specialist brand publishing candidates.

November and March had 47 and 50 candidates respectively with pass rates of 78 per cent and 80 per cent. There was a dip in numbers for the July exam, down to 37 candidates, but the pass rate was 76 per cent, which is in line with the average for the past four years.

After the concerns expressed in this report last year, it was good to see an overall improvement in the marks candidates gained, with more candidates achieving above the required 60 per cent needed to pass. This increase in knowledge and understanding should give confidence to editors.

As in previous reports, the advice to candidates is to revise and be comfortable with the contents of

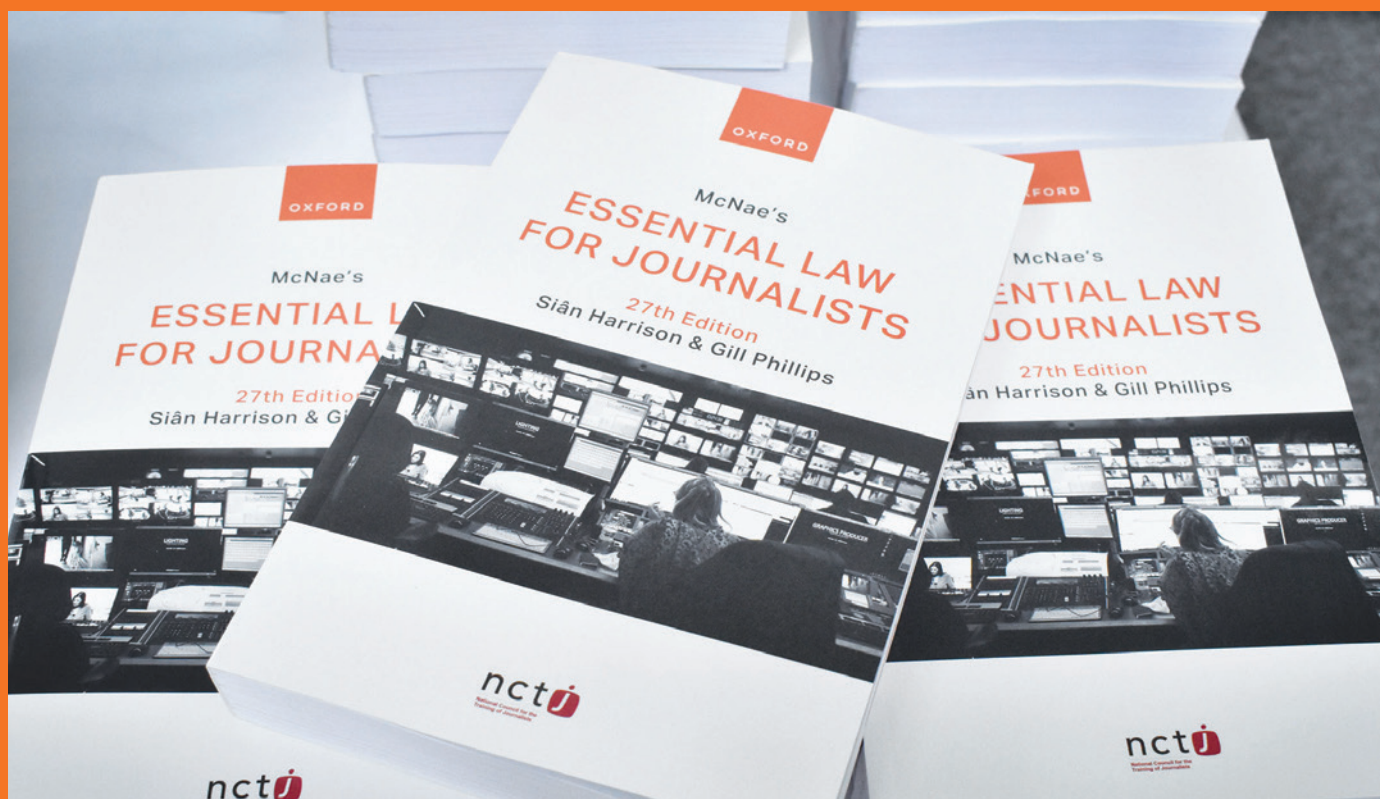
McNae's Essential Law for Journalists. Candidates need to be analytical when tackling questions and ask themselves: 'What is the problem, why is that and do I have a defence? If not, what should I do?'

When it comes to section four, the ethical question, candidates should not just copy out the relevant clauses, but they should also apply them to the scenario and explain why. Finally, candidates need to leave enough time in which to complete the exam.

Keeping up-to-date with legal and ethical news is essential. Questions are often framed around real-life incidents, with the question in section four always based on an IPSO adjudication. Candidates are advised to sign up to either HoldtheFrontPage or Press Gazette to see their reports on legal and ethical issues.

Overall, the top-performing candidates produced some excellent answers and are to be congratulated. We wish future candidates, whether first-timers or resitters, good luck!

Crispin Clark
Chief moderator, media law and ethics in practice



PRACTICAL JOURNALISM SKILLS EXAMS

BIG NEWS STORY

109 candidates; 59 passes – 54 per cent

The big news story is a practical exam testing candidates on their ability to cover a major developing news story at a senior journalist level. Each exam features a different breaking news story, giving candidates the chance to demonstrate their ability to select pertinent facts, showcase their story-writing skills and be able to use different forms of the media, including digital and social media, while working to deadlines and potentially managing a busy newsroom.

In November, candidates faced a breaking news story concerning an overturned lorry that had been abandoned on a busy main road, with people seen running away. With several red herrings, including the suggestion of a charity road race, the story developed into one about illegal immigrants, a lorry with false plates purporting to belong to a genuine logistics firm, and the search for the driver. Candidates identified the red herrings and avoided them in their reports but there was a tendency for an assumption that the readers knew certain aspects, so the finished final Q10 story omitted key information that was important to a new audience.

In the March exam, a topical story about a dog walker being attacked in a public park by a large bull-terrier type dog escalated to reports on social media, with pictures of a wolf, damaged trees, further dog attacks and suggestions the parkland was being used to train fighting dogs. Candidates had to sift the facts from the rumours and create a story that reflected the truth. The incident ended with armed police raiding a house where a police officer was attacked by one of the dogs, and equipment to train fighting dogs was found. It was a complicated story, but it was important to report that arrests were made for both drugs and animal welfare offences.

The July exam saw the scene switch to a shopping centre with reports of a man with a firearm. Shoppers were evacuated as armed police were sent to the scene and a helicopter deployed. The search switched to a house where police were planning to force entry in their search for the man. He was found dead in a shed and, with a final twist, turned out to be the son of a councillor and chair of the Gripton Against Guns Group.

Markers found that there was a tendency by candidates not to read the question properly, which led to insufficient or inaccurate answers. It is important to answer what is asked in the exam and not make assumptions. In writing stories, it is important to reflect the facts and not leave stories open to misinterpretation – particularly at the end where it was necessary to state the man died from self-inflicted gunshot wounds and was not shot by the police.

Results remain in the middle band – pass rates of between 50 and 62 per cent, with an overall pass rate of 54 per cent for the year. More marks are to be gained if candidates read the questions carefully, take time to understand the story and relate answers to the management questions, such as KPIs, to specific aspects of the story.

Candidates should use every minute of their time and make sure they leave a few minutes to check their answers to each section before moving on.

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM

24 candidates; 14 passes – 58 per cent

The community journalism exam assesses a candidate's practical skills in covering stories in local communities. It is part of the NQJ taken by journalists on the community news project pathway. The exam covers a major community news story, designed to assess news sense and a candidate's ability to write an engaging story to length from a wealth of information, coming from both official sources and social media.

In November 2023, the story revolved around the death of thousands of community bees at a village primary school, which were used both for education and a fundraiser for the school through the sale of honey. The bees' death was linked to the use of pesticides on a local farm and the script included many social media comments, which candidates had to sift through and decide if they could be safely published, giving reasons for their decision. Seven candidates sat the exam and four passed.

In the March exam, the story focused on pigeons in a village war memorial garden and pleas not to feed the animals. A pensioner had been fined £100 for dropping off bits of pastry for the birds

and was fined for littering, causing an immediate outcry from villagers. Alongside this, a candlemaker was suffering from fly-tipping outside his gates, which threatened the continuation of the business. Candidates were asked to write a story, provide a fact file, and analyse ten social media posts for suitability to publish or follow up. Ten candidates sat this exam and five passed.

In July, the story was about a new housing estate that was suffering from an unpleasant smell rising from a nearby quarry landfill site. Residents called for the site to be closed and planned a series of protests. An Environmental Agency investigation led to sanctions being applied against the company running the landfill site. It was clear from the brief that the suspension of activities was temporary while work was carried out by the owners, but some candidates read this as a permanent cessation. Seven Facebook posts were provided for candidates to decide whether they would republish and give their rationale. This exam had the highest pass rate of the year with five out of seven passing – a pass rate of 71 per cent.

Faith Lee
Chief moderator, the big news story and community journalism

SPECIALIST BRAND PUBLISHING

20 candidates; 18 passes – 90 per cent

The relatively new specialist brand publishing assessment has provided a viable pathway for magazine journalists to reach the NQJ standard.

The aim of the assessment is to provide candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate awareness of how to use editorial content to build their publication's brand. This involves creating a package for the candidate's own title and involves conducting research and interviewing during office hours before the collation and writing on the NQJ assessment day. The story is then published online and followed by social media promotion to either consolidate or build the brand's audience.

Only a handful of candidates have previously sat the assessment but this year there was a marked increase with 20 candidates over the course of the three NQJ sittings, and markers were impressed with the quality of excellent work.

John Dilley
Chief moderator, specialist brand publishing

E-LOGBOOK

89 candidates; 89 passes – 100 per cent

A positive shift has been observed where candidates are receiving increased support from their employers, leading to an improvement in the quality of work submitted. It is encouraging to see that this trend has continued into 2024, with the pass rate rising from 99 per cent to an impressive 100 per cent.

This report covers a period of significant change in the industry, with traditional methods of working evolving rapidly.

Despite these challenges, candidates have successfully met the requirements of our e-logbook categories, demonstrating their abilities across a wide range of essential journalistic tasks.

We are pleased to report that the results continue to meet the needs of news journalists working online, in print and broadcast, community journalists, and specialist brand publishers.

A significant increase in the number of broadcast journalism logbooks has been observed, reflecting the growing interest and engagement in this area. Not only has there been a rise in submissions, but the quality of these logbooks has also been consistently high.

There are no areas of concern regarding submissions. However, as always, if any current or future candidates have questions or issues related to the logbook, they are encouraged to contact the NCTJ directly.

Darren Isted
Chief moderator, e-logbook



RESULTS ANALYSIS

Level 6 National Qualification in Journalism results 2023-24

The below results summary details the overall NQJ results achieved in 2023-24:

TOTAL ENTRY	
No of candidates	129
No of passes	86
No of failures	43
% passed	66%

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

PRACTICAL SKILLS EXAMS	
No of candidates	153
No of passes	49
No of failures	31
% passed	61%

MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS IN PRACTICE	
No of candidates	134
No of passes	92
No of failures	42
% passed	69%

E-LOGBOOK	
No of candidates	89
No of passes	89
No of failures	0
% passed	100%

The below results summary details the breakdown of the overall NQJ results achieved by pass, merit and distinction:

	NO OF CANDIDATES	% ACHIEVED
Distinction	48	56%
Merit	33	38%
Pass	5	5%





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