

## SO YOU WANT TO BE A JOURNALIST?

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**T**his information pack has been compiled by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) especially for 16-19 year olds considering a career in journalism. It will help you to make the right choices regarding further and higher education courses, advise you of the exams you must pass in order to work as a journalist within certain fields, and help you choose the right study method for you.

So why listen to us? Well, the NCTJ delivers the premier journalism training scheme in the UK. We are dedicated to providing a world-class education and training system that develops current and future journalists for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our range of journalism training products and services includes: accredited courses; qualifications and examinations; awards; careers information; distance learning; short courses and continuing professional development; information and research; publications; and events. We play an influential role in all areas of journalism education and training.

So let's start at the beginning and keep it simple. There are five main branches of journalism: newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and online.

You can start a career in any one of them, and it's not a necessity to start on a small newspaper, niche magazine or tiny cable channel. You could quite easily begin on a large regional daily, top consumer title or the BBC.

Some of the journalists have learned their trade on the job, but many will have undergone some kind of formal training.

Not everyone who has undergone formal training is brilliant at their job, and by no means everyone who picked things up as they went along is a bad journalist.

But what training does is give able people a short cut. It saves them time by teaching them the basics of journalism quickly, accurately and effectively. It means they don't need to learn by trial and error. They can get it right first time.

And the NCTJ is second-to-none in setting the standards for journalism training. Through its examinations and the courses which carry its accreditation, it equips would-be journalists to find their first job in the profession, and helps working journalists to progress to the next rung up the ladder.

An NCTJ qualification equips you with the skills you need to be an effective reporter. It gives you a solid grounding in shorthand, law and how government works. With an NCTJ certificate on your CV, a prospective employer knows you have grasped the basics.

If, even after reading this leaflet, you're still not sure, we'll be more than happy to answer any questions you have about the NCTJ and the courses we accredit. You can call us on 01799 544014, email us at [info@nctj.com](mailto:info@nctj.com) or visit us at [www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com).

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## **TRAIN AS A JOURNALIST – CAREERS ADVICE**

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**N**ewspaper journalism is often seen as glamorous and exciting but, as with any occupation, success comes only after much hard work and routine activity. However, each day in newspapers is different and the training you receive will give you the flexibility to cover a wide range of news stories and features.

Newspaper journalism draws on all the knowledge and skills you have acquired and can give you a tremendous sense of achievement. If you've got what it takes, journalism could be the career for you!

### **What qualities do newspaper editors look for?**

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To convince an editor you are worth appointing you will need to be able to demonstrate the following:

- an interest in current affairs at all levels
- a lively interest in people, places and events
- an ability to write in a style which is easy to understand
- good spelling, grammar and punctuation
- an appreciation of the part a local newspaper plays in the community
- a willingness to accept irregular hours
- an ability to work under pressure to meet deadlines
- determination and persistence.

### **How do I get into the newspaper industry?**

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#### **ROUTE 1 – DIRECT ENTRY**

Trainee reporters and photographers are recruited directly by regional or local newspapers and carry out their basic training under the terms of a training contract. Also there are those who may have secured employment with a newspaper group of companies who run their own training scheme.

Apply directly to the editor of a regional or local newspaper for employment as a trainee. Their names and addresses can be obtained from current editions of Benn's UK Media Directory and Willings Press Guide. Copies are available at your local library under the reference section.

#### **● What qualifications do I need?**

The entry requirement for reporters is a minimum of five GCSE passes (grades A-C) or equivalent - one of these must be in English. However, in recent years it has become rare for a trainee to come into the industry at this level. Currently more than 60% of recruits are university graduates and the others have achieved at least two A-levels or equivalent.

### ● Exemptions

There have been occasions when individuals who have shown exceptional talent but have not achieved the minimum academic qualifications have been granted a waiver. However, this is unusual. The majority of new entrants to journalism are graduates.

### ● Mature entrants

Each year the industry receives many career enquiries from mature people. Some editors like to employ these people because of their considerable local knowledge and their settled life style.

Over the age of 30, training is a matter for arrangement by the editor.

### ● Training

If you have been recruited into the industry from school or university, you will be regarded as a **direct entrant**. Most companies will expect you to enter into a two-year training contract during which time you will receive basic training. The first six months of employment is likely to be a probationary period during which you will be able to decide whether you have got what it takes to become a successful journalist. Most companies will register you with the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) and provide you with a distance learning foundation course to study.

You should ideally attend a block release or day release course at college, during which time you will sit the NCTJ's preliminary Certificates in Journalism examinations. Following a further period of employment, you will have the opportunity to prove that you are competent to obtain the NCTJ's National Certificate.

Trainees recruited by in-company training schemes will undertake their off-the-job training at their company training centres. The NCTJ currently accredits one in-company training scheme: Midland News Association (contact Mr. Crispin Clark on 01902 742126). Training will be directed to the achievement of professional standards and to the attainment of a competence-based qualification.

### ***ROUTE 2 – PRE-ENTRY – VIA A COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY COURSE***

The majority of trainees are recruited into the industry after attending full-time vocational training courses for both post A-level students and graduates. Such courses are held at colleges and universities accredited by the NCTJ. Some of these courses are for graduates only; others require five GCSEs including English and two A-levels. This route is known as pre-entry.

Download an application form from the courses section of the NCTJ's website [www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com) or write to the NCTJ at the address overleaf, enclosing an A4 stamped addressed envelope. Please return the form as soon as possible or at least six weeks prior to the start of the course.

Suitable applicants are required to take a written test, and if successful, will be invited to attend a selection interview at the college of their choice.

Fast-track courses are run at various colleges - see separate list for details.

Most colleges will only grant places if the applicants have already been on a brief work experience placement at a newspaper. You should write to a number of local newspaper editors, explain why you think you would make a good reporter and ask if they will allow you to join their team for a few days. Try to pick a time other than June or July, when pressure on work experience places is at its greatest.

### ● Paying for a college course

A few local educational authorities **may** award grants to meet part of the cost. Early enquiries should be made to local authorities, because grants are extremely limited.

Before applying for a full-time course in newspaper journalism it is essential that candidates establish the financial situation. Contact the college direct for course fees etc.

Candidates who wish to pursue their application and who are unable to obtain a grant should consider carefully what arrangements they will have to make to cover the costs involved. Depending on the college to which a candidate is allocated, tuition fees can be as high as £1,300 for the year. In addition there are subsistence costs, travel, exam fees and textbooks to be considered.

Career Development Loans may also be available. Contact your local careers office or job centre.

For post-graduate courses at universities apply direct to university. For degree courses apply through UCAS.

### ● Bursary schemes

A Journalism Diversity Fund has been set up by those in the industry who want to join together to support the training of journalists from ethnically and socially diverse backgrounds.

It is aimed at people without the financial means to attend NCTJ training courses. Applicants will need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to journalism and the potential to be successful.

Check out the website: [www.journalismdiversityfund.com](http://www.journalismdiversityfund.com) if you think you might meet the criteria and want to find out more about the application and selection process.

### ● What do I have to study?

Currently, training courses lead to a variety of qualifications. All NCTJ courses cover those aspects of law, public affairs and newspaper journalism necessary to enable a journalist to perform competently by the end of the training period. As well as demonstrating competence in these and other practical areas, trainees are expected to achieve 100 wpm shorthand.

### ● Training

If you have attended a full-time journalism course before obtaining employment, you will probably enter into an 18-month training contract - the first three months is likely to be a probationary period. As with direct entrants, you will still be expected to prove your competence after a period of employment, and obtain the NCTJ's National Certificate.

### **What about press photography?**

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Photo-journalism, as the term implies, is a journalism-based course with photography as its foundation. Tutors will help you develop natural news sense in tune with an ability to use a camera and ancillary equipment to the best advantage; there is also a comprehensive reporter module.

The press photography course contains all the above elements without the reporter's module.

The qualities you need to be accepted on the NCTJ course and to be a photo-journalist/press photographer are energy; drive; commitment; single-mindedness; personality and an enquiring mind which can look at the obvious and see something different - or better - by way of a "news line" and picture.

If you are successful in obtaining a place at Sheffield College or Darlington College, you will undergo intensive practical and theoretical training to prepare you for your career.

Download an application form from the courses section of the NCTJ's website [www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com) or write to the NCTJ at the address overleaf, enclosing an A4 stamped addressed envelope.

Suitable applicants are required to take a written test, and if successful, will be invited to attend a selection interview.

Qualifications required for direct entry (Route 1 Sheffield College) are four GCSEs (A-C) including English. To attend the courses (Route 2) at Sheffield College an additional 'A' level is required or Darlington College require a minimum of two 'A' levels

In most companies, the NCTJ's National Certificate in Press Photography/Photo-journalism will be available after a successful period of employment.

### **What about Magazines?**

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Courses are run at various colleges - see separate list for details.

The courses cover media law, ethics, government, shorthand to 80 wpm, news & feature writing, production and design, subbing and background to the magazine industry.

There is also a mandatory period of work experience on a magazine. NCTJ preliminary examinations will be undertaken, together with the assessment of a portfolio of work produced on course.

Download an application form from the courses section of the NCTJ's website [www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com) or write to the NCTJ at the address overleaf, enclosing an A4 stamped addressed envelope. Please return the application form as soon as possible or at least six weeks prior to the start of the course.

Suitable applicants are required to take a written test, and if successful, will be invited to attend a selection interview at the college of their choice.

## **CERTIFICATES IN JOURNALISM REPORTERS**

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The seven Certificates in Journalism for reporters are compulsory for those going on to take the NCTJ's professional qualification, the National Certificate Examination.

In most cases the exams will be sat whilst on an NCTJ accredited course or during an in-company training course. A portfolio will also be submitted for assessment. They are also available on national exam days held twice-yearly in May and November – application forms are obtainable from the NCTJ between January-March for May exams and July-September for November exams.

### **EXAMINATIONS**

- **News Writing:** a news story of 275/325 words is required from printed material; a short story of between 70-80 words from the material provided; a short story of between 40-50 words from the material provided and five follow-up ideas must be suggested; time allowed is two hours; dictionaries may be used; exam must be word-processed. Stories outside the given word limit will be penalised; marking will take into account use of language and normal principles of journalism practice; inaccurate quoting will be penalised.
- **Public Affairs:** (Part 1) Four questions on Local Government, one of which is a compulsory finance question. Time allowed is two hours. No dictionaries or textbooks allowed. (Part 2) Four questions on Central Government. Time allowed is 2 hours. No dictionaries or textbooks allowed.
- **Media Law:** (Part 1) will examine court reporting and related issues in defamation (privilege) and contempt (sections 4 and 11 of the Contempt of Court Act), sources of law, crime terminology, relevant aspects of the PCC code. Time allowed is 2 hours. No textbooks or dictionaries are allowed. (Part 2) will examine general reporting (excluding court reporting). It will take in defamation, contempt, copyright, confidentiality, other parts of the PCC code. Time allowed is 2 hours. No textbooks or dictionaries are allowed.
- **Shorthand (Teeline):** A practical examination set at 100 wpm. The exam consists of two passages of two minutes each with an interval of 30 seconds between them. Transcription time of 45 minutes is allowed. The error margin is 2.5%, and each mistake counts as one error.

### **ASSESSMENT**

- **Portfolio:** The portfolio is a record of training and provides evidence of a range of reporting and writing exercises, as part of coursework or during work experience. When complete, the Portfolio will include ten cuttings, with original copy and explanatory cover sheets, of real-world news stories and one cutting of a minimum 500 word feature.

Fees are £36.00 including VAT per exam/assessment; shorthand - £11.00 per attempt.

# CERTIFICATES IN JOURNALISM MAGAZINES

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Trainees on NCTJ accredited Magazine courses will sit the following exams and submit a portfolio for assessment.

## EXAMINATIONS

- **Handout** - a news story of 200/250 words is required from printed material; five follow-up ideas must be suggested; time allowed is one hour; dictionaries may be used; exam must be word-processed or typed. Stories outside the given word limit will be penalised; marking will take into account use of language and normal principles of journalism practice; inaccurate quoting will be penalised.

Or

- **News Writing** - a news story of 275/325 words is required from printed material; a short story of between 70-80 words from the material provided; a short story of between 40-50 words from the material provided and five follow-up ideas must be suggested; time allowed is two hours; dictionaries may be used; exam must be word-processed. Stories outside the given word limit will be penalised; marking will take into account use of language and normal principles of journalism practice; inaccurate quoting will be penalised.

Plus

- **Public Affairs Part 2** - four questions on Central Government; time allowed is two hours; no dictionaries or textbooks allowed.
- **Media Law Part 2** - covers defamation and contempt; time allowed is two hours; no dictionaries or textbooks allowed.
- **Subbing** - a two-hour exercise in subbing hard copy; subbing on screen; copy correction using proof correction marks; cutting copy, writing headlines, captions and pull (stand alone) quotes; dealing with pictures/images; laying out and designing a two-page spread.
- **Shorthand @ 80wpm** - a practical exam consisting of two passages of two minutes each with an interval of 30 seconds; transcription time of 35 minutes is allowed; error margin is 2.5%; each mistake counts as one error; dictionaries are allowed.

## ASSESSMENT

- **Portfolio** containing evidence of knowledge and competence in the following elements:
  - Feature writing
  - Production and design
  - Background to magazine industry
  - Work experience

Fees are £36.00 including VAT per exam/assessment; shorthand - £11.00 per attempt.

## **CERTIFICATES IN JOURNALISM**

### ***PHOTOGRAPHERS***

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Certificates in Journalism for photographers are compulsory examinations for those going on to take the NCTJ's professional qualification, the National Certificate Examination.

In most cases the exams will be sat whilst on an NCTJ accredited course.

#### **PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS:**

- **General Photographic Knowledge:** time allowed – 1½ hours to answer 13 questions (three 3 in Part One; 10 In Part Two) . No dictionaries or textbooks allowed.
- **General Newspaper Practice:** time allowed – 2 hours to answer five from six questions. No dictionaries or textbooks allowed.
- **Law for Photographers:** time allowed – 1½ hours to answer five from six questions. No dictionaries or textbooks allowed.
- **Caption Writing:** time allowed - 1 hour to write captions of 80-100 words to two photographs provided. Dictionaries may be used but no textbooks.

#### **PHOTO-JOURNALISTS:**

Photo-journalists sit examinations as above in General Photographic Knowledge, Newspaper Practice and Law and must also sit:

- **News Writing for Photo-journalists:** time allowed – 1½ hours to write: (a) an 80-100-word caption for a single photograph (b) a 150-170-word composite caption for three photographs with a common thread.

Fees are £36.00 including VAT per exam.