



SUBMISSION TO THE LEVESON INQUIRY BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE TRAINING OF JOURNALISTS

Overview of the NCTJ

The NCTJ was established by the industry in 1951 to run the regional newspaper's training scheme and this year is celebrating sixty years of quality journalism training. It was set up following the findings of a Royal Commission on the press.

It is dedicated to providing a world-class education and training system that develops current and future journalists for the demands of a fast-changing multimedia industry.

The NCTJ's range of products and services include: course accreditation; qualifications; awards; distance learning; careers information; training and continuing professional development; information and research; and communications and events.

While its traditional focus has been in the regional newspaper sector, it is increasingly playing a role in the wider media reflecting the convergence of journalism skills. The NCTJ is making major developments in training content, delivery, accreditation and assessment, in a fast-changing industry facing challenging new conditions and opportunities.

Recognised by Ofqual, the qualifications and examinations regulator, the NCTJ organises more than 15,500 examinations each year. Almost 1,700 students and trainees take the Diploma in Journalism for news reporters, sub editors, sports journalists, magazine journalists, broadcast journalists, press photographers and photo journalists. Around 300 journalists train each year for the National Certificate Examination, the qualification for senior professional regional newspaper journalists, sub-editors, press photographers and photo journalists.

There are 39 colleges, universities and commercial providers approved by the NCTJ to offer accredited journalism training courses leading to NCTJ qualifications. The organisation provides a range of services for its centres and plays an influential role in all areas of journalism education and training.

The NCTJ's publications, such as *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists*, are highly respected in the journalism field. The NCTJ is the contact point for those looking for a career in journalism and provides advice to thousands of aspiring and current journalists.

The NCTJ is an independent registered industry charity. The organisation has won a National Training Award and is an Investor in People at gold level. Employees are based at the charity's self-contained offices in Newport, Saffron Walden, Essex and there are more than 250 freelance examiners, trainers and industry volunteers. The organisation's structure includes trustees of the charity, a board of directors, accreditation, qualifications and examination boards, editors' focus groups, forums for heads of journalism and course leaders, and a Student Council.

The organisation's £1m funding comes from media companies, industry sponsors and from income generated from products and services. The NCTJ receives no public funding. The NCTJ also administers the industry's Journalism Diversity Fund which awards bursaries to those who cannot afford to train as journalists. Further information about the NCTJ can be found on the charity's website: www.nctj.com.

General teaching of ethics

The NCTJ does not seek to defend the current, or to influence the future, regulatory framework for the press in the UK. We regard our role as one of ensuring that the industry's education, training and qualifications produce high quality, professional journalists. This includes ethics training and assessment in the regulatory codes and media law as well as the integration of ethics training and professional conduct into the full range of journalism skills. Truth, accuracy, objectivity and fairness are at the heart of everything the NCTJ stands for.

The NCTJ currently accredits 68 pre-entry journalism courses. All of them have to deliver the NCTJ's syllabus and assessments and open themselves and their students to public scrutiny – this requires time, commitment, dedication and resources. Examination results tables are published annually in December.

The NCTJ accredits a range of different types of courses to provide a choice of routes into journalism careers. There are further education courses, undergraduate and postgraduate higher education courses, and commercial courses.

It is mandatory for all students on NCTJ-accredited courses to sit the Diploma in Journalism. There are no exemptions or exceptions; it is an exacting national industry standard. Centres delivering NCTJ-accredited courses must meet the industry's accreditation standard for training.

All trainees employed on regional newspapers, having passed the Diploma (including 100wpm shorthand) and completed a minimum of 18-months of training, sit the National Certificate Examination or an in-company qualification, which they must pass to qualify as seniors. The names of all those gaining the 'gold standard' are published in the NCTJ's annual report. In the regional press progression to senior status depends on success in this examination.

NCTJ qualifications remain one of this country's toughest tests of professional skills. They require huge amounts of skill, ability, persistence and determination – the very qualities editors want in their newsroom journalists.

A claim was made by an individual attending one of the inquiry seminars that the NCTJ does not teach ethics. We accept that this may depend on a definition of 'ethics'. The NCTJ deals with ethics in a practical and applied way rather than in an abstract, philosophical and academic way. NCTJ centres running academic courses can deliver any additional academic modules they wish and so there is no 'straightjacket' in that sense. However, centres running accredited courses must demonstrate that the industry's accreditation standard is met by the course and the Diploma in Journalism is delivered effectively and in full.

Case studies from centres explaining how the teaching of ethics is integrated into NCTJ-accredited courses are included in this submission together with a copy of the accreditation standard.

Teaching and examination of ethics in NCTJ media law exams

Within the Diploma in Journalism there are currently two 'preliminary' exams in media law: 'Court Reporting and Associated Matters' and 'Essential Media Law'. The NCTJ programmes of study for media law (the syllabi) require the Press Complaints Commission as an institution and the whole of the Editors' Code of Practice to be among the subjects taught and studied.

The following clauses of the Editors' Code of Practice are also among the subjects to be examined - that is, they feature specifically in questions in the NCTJ's 'preliminary' exams in media law in the Diploma in Journalism: Clause 1 (Accuracy); Clause 3 (Privacy, which since 2004 has referred specifically to digital communications); Clause 4 (Harassment); Clause 5 (Intrusions into Grief and Shock); Clause 6 (Children); Clause 7 (Children in Sex cases); Clause 10 (Clandestine Devices and Subterfuge, which since 2004 has specifically prohibited the interception of private or mobile telephone calls, messages or emails); Clause 11 (Victims of Sexual Assault); Clause 14 (Confidential Sources).

The term 'preliminary' refers to these exams being among the set of NCTJ qualifications regarded as pre-entry training for those hoping to enter journalism as a career, or post-entry training taken by recruits to the profession soon after their employment. It should be noted that these are the main NCTJ exams in media law, and so are not preliminary to any other exam solely in media law. Questions in the National Certificate Examination – the NCTJ's 'senior status' qualification, taken by those who have been employed as journalists for 18 months or more – will include elements of media law, regulation and ethics in wider applied journalistic scenarios.

Some clauses of the Editors' Code are not included in the examination topics because, though they are required to be taught and studied, they relate to specialist or managerial areas of journalistic activity whereas the 'preliminary' exams are intended to focus on the general (though detailed) knowledge needed by those relatively inexperienced in journalism to acquit themselves well, responsibly and safely (as regards legal and regulatory requirements) in their early years in the career. A trainee is unlikely, for example, to take decisions on payments to witnesses (Clause 15) or to criminals (Clause 16) or on how fair opportunity to reply to an inaccuracy will be given (Clause 3). Other clauses – for example, on the ethical obligation not to enter a hospital without permission or banning pejorative reference to an individual's race – are easily understood and so not examined on. There is an argument for further clauses to be included in the examination topics. But the NCTJ media law examination board is conscious of the wide scope of media law on which it is essential to examine candidates. It is wary of placing too much burden on them in terms of subjects they will not encounter or be responsible for in the early stages of their careers.

The requirement for Ofcom and its code to be taught and studied was introduced in the 2010-2011 academic year, as a consequence of the NCTJ's decision to incorporate broadcast regulation into its multimedia training and qualifications. This decision followed a consultation exercise in which the views of editors, educators and students were canvassed. Universities, colleges and other training centres whose courses are accredited by the NCTJ were required to begin teaching broadcast regulation in either 2010-11 or 2011-12, including as subjects to be examined. Many were already teaching elements of broadcast regulation. To accommodate this transition to elements of broadcast regulation being examined, the NCTJ media law examinations board has adopted the policy of allowing exam candidates in 2011-12 to answer exam questions relating to ethics by reference to either the Editors' Code of Practice or the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, and will not set questions solely relating

to one code until the 2012-13 year at the earliest. This policy gives opportunity to consider if the integration of broadcast regulation into teaching and examinations needs any fine-tuning.

The Court Reporting exam is compulsory for candidates taking the NCTJ preliminary exams for newspaper journalism, and is an option for candidates training for other types of journalism.

The Essential Law and Court Reporting programmes of study are enclosed in full. It can be seen they include other guidance on what exam candidates should know and revise in respect of the codes and PCC or Ofcom adjudications. Candidates are expected to know that the codes in some situations reflect and reinforce the law's requirements but in others – where the law does not ban or penalise publication or other journalistic activity – the codes mean that an ethical decision has to be taken on what should be published or what inquiries made or methods used.

Sample exams and marking guides are included in this submission.

McNae's Essential Law for Journalists

The programmes of study refer to relevant pages in *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists*, the well-known and respected textbook and newsroom manual on media law matters. Published by Oxford University Press, the NCTJ owns the book's copyright, having been gifted it by the original author Leonard McNae. The tradition has been for at least one of its authors to be a member of the NCTJ media law examinations board. The current chair of the board and the NCTJ's chief examiner Mark Hanna is co-author of the current 20th edition. He has been working as co-author (with Mike Dodd, legal editor of the Press Association as the other co-author) on the 21st edition which is now in the production process at Oxford University Press, due to be published in March 2012. The 21st edition, in response to events and NCTJ policy, will place even greater emphasis on ethical and regulatory matters – for example, the Editors' Code and Ofcom code will be introduced more fully earlier in the book's structure, in chapters two and three. The book contains caveats that the self-regulation/regulation of the media may be subject to change as a result of the Leveson Inquiry and the industry's review of regulation, and has a website where updates can be posted.

Ethical behaviour in the newsroom and future developments

We believe that NCTJ training is robust and students should have all the fundamental skills and knowledge in place for newsroom employment if they study and pass the Diploma in Journalism.

Those employed as trainees in the regional press develop and hone these skills in preparation for qualification as senior journalists. All regional newspaper trainees sit the National Certificate Examination or their company's equivalent in-house qualification. The Logbook, which all trainees must complete for at least 18 months of their training, won a National Training Award for the NCTJ.

We are currently reviewing our approach to ethics training and its assessment in NCTJ qualifications for both student and trainee journalists. We will continue to ensure ethical journalism is integrated into all our training and assessments. However, we are considering placing even greater emphasis on its importance, perhaps with a dedicated, assessed ethics module.

We recognise that ethical behaviour will also be shaped by the prevailing newsroom culture and editorial decision-making. We are therefore considering ways the NCTJ can help further with the continuing professional development of all senior journalists and leadership and management development for editors and other senior editorial managers.

These matters are being urgently reviewed with the involvement and help of all our stakeholders. Our Directors and Trustees as well as our Journalism Qualifications Board, chaired by Stephen Mitchell, deputy head of BBC News, our Accreditation Board, chaired by Chris Elliott, readers' editor of the Guardian, and all our examination boards, have already started this detailed work. The National Certificate Examination is being re-launched next year as the Advanced Diploma in Journalism and we are considering the development of a foundation certificate level qualification. Our 60th anniversary conference in Belfast on 30 November and 1 December 2011 was also a focus for these discussions.

List of documents included as evidence with this submission:

- ❖ Accreditation standard
- ❖ Case studies from centres to explain how the teaching of ethics is integrated into NCTJ-accredited courses
- ❖ Media law and court reporting programmes of study
- ❖ Sample exams and marking guides

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Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

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