

## **National Council for the Training of Journalists—written evidence (FOJ0020)**

### **House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee – Inquiry into the Future of Journalism**

This submission has been split into three parts – plus a summary below. The first gives an overview of the work of the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ); the second answers the questions set out in the Committee’s call for evidence (and some additional queries arising from oral evidence given by the NCTJ’s Will Gore on 10 March); the third sets out a number of proposals for possible public policy interventions in the arena of journalism training and skills development.

#### **Summary**

The NCTJ welcomes this inquiry, and especially the focus around journalism training. As the only organisation in the UK solely focussed on developing and awarding journalism qualifications, the NCTJ is glad to have the opportunity to respond to the questions asked by the Committee.

One of the great strengths of UK journalism over the years has been the commitment of employers to ensuring new entrants are trained to a high, industry-backed standard, and to training junior reporters to a senior level once they are in work.

However, while pre-entry training remains both strong and relevant, the NCTJ believes the time has come for significant public policy interventions in this field, primarily:

- A. Backing for NCTJ proposals around the delivery of skills development for in-work journalists (via NQJ-delivery and other upskilling programmes);
- B. Greater incentives around the employment of apprentices (at both junior, and the upcoming senior, level)
- C. Encouragement/incentives for universities to incorporate the practical, industry-backed Diploma in Journalism into journalism degree courses, to better equip those starting out in the industry
- D. Backing for the Journalism Diversity Fund
- E. Support for raising the profile of journalism (and professional training) among school children
- F. Recognition of the role played by regional media companies in journalism training via support for those putting candidates forward for the NQJ (senior journalist exam)

These suggestions are examined in more detail in Part III of this submission (p17).

## **INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic during the last two months has had a profound impact on every aspect of life in the UK. The vital role of high-quality news journalism has been emphasised enormously; yet paradoxically, the consequences of the virus's spread – and the actions taken to combat it – have placed unprecedented strain on the way most journalism is financed.

The National Council for the Training of Journalists is not immune to the impact of the present crisis: all its core revenue streams are likely to be adversely affected by the general economic squeeze and the particular uncertainty around the higher and further education sectors. The knock-on consequences for the journalism sector are obvious if the training pipeline for new talent is disrupted.

This submission is made with this immediate context in mind, but with an eye too on the needs that existed prior to the pandemic emerging. Those pre-existing needs are likely to become even more pressing in the future, even while new imperatives are identified as a direct result of the challenges presented by current circumstances.

## **PART I**

### **The National Council for the Training of Journalists**

#### **Background**

1. The NCTJ exists to maintain high standards of training and to promote skills development in UK journalism.
2. It is an industry-backed and supported charity which was set up in 1951. For nearly 70 years it has catered for the changing skills needs of the news media sector. It is an awarding organisation, regulated by Ofqual in England, and works closely with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) to develop and assess journalism apprenticeships. The NCTJ is the only organisation in the UK which is solely focussed on developing and awarding journalism qualifications.
3. While the charity's roots were in print journalism, today it prepares students for careers in all forms of media – print, digital and broadcast – and for jobs beyond traditional journalism. Our qualifications have evolved in line with industry requirements thanks to input from journalism practitioners across the industry. We also work increasingly to upskill journalists throughout their careers.
4. The NCTJ works with – and is supported by – strategic partners from across the media sector. A full list of the charity's strategic partners appears in Appendix 1. The following organisations are represented on the NCTJ's board of trustees: Archant, BBC, Financial Times, JPIMedia, Midland News Association, News Media Association, NLA Media Access, Newsquest, Reach, Reuters, Sky, Ulster University.
5. Additional boards are constituted of industry and academic members to oversee qualifications development, accreditation and exams.
6. The NCTJ has an income of around £1m per annum (excluding income to the Journalism Diversity Fund, see paragraph 8). Approximately 65 per cent comes from course, exam and accreditation fees. The remainder is primarily income from upskilling events and other work around continuous professional development, and support from strategic partners and other sponsors. The

organisation has a staff of 13 people and works with consultants as appropriate – notably around its research programme.

7. In 2020, the NCTJ's core role remains the development of journalism qualifications and the accreditation of teaching courses at educational establishments. It also runs direct training programmes – face-to-face and via distance learning – for individuals or for specific clients (within and outside the news media arena).
8. In response to an identified lack of diversity in the sector<sup>1</sup>, since 2005 the NCTJ has run the Journalism Diversity Fund, which awards bursaries to students from diverse backgrounds who are in financial need and who are committed to undertaking journalism training. 347 individuals have been supported through NCTJ diploma courses, with the vast majority going on to have successful journalistic careers. The JDF has a ring-fenced income of just over £300,000 per year; the average cost of a bursary is £8,000.
9. In 2018, the NCTJ partnered with Facebook and nine regional newspaper publishers to oversee the Community News Project, which aims to support at least 80 journalists into community reporting roles where they undertake training towards an NCTJ qualification. This project was launched with £4.5m backing from Facebook, in response to an identified decline in the number of community-focused reporters in regional newsrooms. It also sought to make junior roles accessible to non-traditional entrants from diverse backgrounds.

## Training today

10. The primary pre-entry qualification studied by journalism students is the NCTJ's Diploma in Journalism. Around 1,500 students work towards this practical, industry-backed qualification each year<sup>2</sup>. It is a flexible, modular qualification combining traditional skills such as shorthand, court reporting and media law with training on subjects such as digital reporting and use of data. Some courses focus on broadcast journalism, others lean towards print and digital, while some have an emphasis on sports journalism: but all students must learn core journalistic skills and ethics.
11. 65 per cent of all students who undertake a diploma course (including those who do not complete the qualification) go on to gain jobs in journalism within six months. Looking only at those who achieve the "gold standard" (A-C in all modules), 90 per cent who move straight into employment do so as journalists<sup>3</sup>. By contrast, just 26 per cent of the overall population of students taking undergraduate degrees in journalism, who get a job within six months of graduating, do so within journalism<sup>4</sup>.
12. Because the qualification is developed in conjunction with industry, editors can be confident that individuals holding the diploma will be ready for work in a modern newsroom. Some outlets (notably among regional news publishers) require all successful job applicants to have achieved the diploma.
13. Other routes into the industry do exist – via non-journalism degrees, non-NCTJ accredited journalism courses, through publisher training schemes (some of which

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<sup>1</sup> *Journalists at Work*, Journalism Training Forum, 2002

<sup>2</sup> It remains to be seen whether numbers of students taking up the diploma in 2020/21 are significantly affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

<sup>3</sup> *Destinations of NCTJ Diploma in Journalism Students*, NCTJ, 2019

<sup>4</sup> *Destinations of Leavers Survey*, HESA, 2014/15

include the NCTJ Diploma in Journalism), apprenticeships (which also include the diploma), or, more rarely, directly into junior roles without qualifications.

14. Overall, 81 per cent of qualified journalists hold a journalism qualification, of which 81 per cent have an NCTJ qualification (most of the remainder holding a journalism degree from a non-NCTJ accredited centre/course).
15. In addition to the diploma, the NCTJ has developed a Certificate in Foundation Journalism (CFJ), which is intended as an introductory qualification, ideal for individuals who wish to test their interest in journalism. The CFJ is sat by around 100 people a year, although the NCTJ is working to increase that number significantly.
16. For journalists who achieve the diploma "gold standard", there is the opportunity to sit the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ), which demonstrates that an individual is suitable to become a senior reporter. The qualification is assessed by a portfolio of material produced by the individual in the course of their work, and by stringent exams testing skills and knowledge in "real-life" scenarios.
17. Last year 103 reporters sat the NQJ. The number of people taking the qualification has declined in recent times, largely because there are fewer individuals working in established regional news companies (which have been particularly supportive of the NQJ model), and because of the costs associated with undertaking professional qualifications in work.
18. In response to the fall in numbers, the NCTJ has developed new "pathways" to achieving the NQJ, so that there are routes applicable to broadcast journalists, production journalists and others, in addition to general news reporters. A new assessment for community reporters has been developed as part of the Community News Project, and the NCTJ is currently examining potential pathways focussed on court reporting and coverage of public bodies.
19. The NCTJ is also encouraging *national* news outlets to develop junior journalists via training for the NQJ, recognising that the numbers of reporters going directly to these organisations (instead of doing so via the *regional* media) has grown significantly in the last decade.
20. Overall, research by the NCTJ has shown a decline in learning opportunities for in-work journalists, alongside a desire among the majority of journalists (64 per cent) to learn new skills in order to help advance their careers<sup>5</sup>.
21. The NCTJ is currently developing a senior level apprenticeship which will incorporate the NQJ. We hope this will arrest the decline in numbers taking the qualification and encourage a renewed emphasis on continuous professional development, which has become less structured in recent times.

## **Diversity**

22. The NCTJ is committed to making its courses accessible to as wide a pool of people as possible. Fifteen years ago, it established the Journalism Diversity Fund to support individuals who would otherwise not be able to finance their studies, through NCTJ-accredited courses.
23. The scheme was made possible thanks to a £100,000 annual donation from NLA media access. Other sponsors have subsequently given their backing to the JDF.

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<sup>5</sup> *Journalists at Work*, NCTJ, 2018

At present it is financially backed by the following organisations: NLA media access, Google News Initiative; Associated Newspapers; BBC; Bloomberg; Dow Jones; *Financial Times*; Newsquest; PA Media; The Printing Charity; Reach plc; Reuters; and Sky.

24. Since 2005 the JDF has supported 347 people from diverse backgrounds through their NCTJ training. The vast majority of recipients successfully go on to careers in journalism. Research carried out by the NCTJ in summer 2019 indicated that 90 per cent of those who had received JDF bursaries in the three academic years to 2018/19 were working as journalists or were about to enter the industry having very recently finished their Diploma in Journalism course.
25. The NCTJ recently launched a fundraising drive to try to increase annual revenues to the JDF to £500,000 (last year the fund received donations of just over £300,000). This was in response to growing numbers of successful bursary applications, which has led to concern that demand for assistance will soon outrun the supply of funding.
26. While numerous initiatives in the arena of diversity and inclusion have emerged in recent years – many of them positive – the JDF remains a tried and tested programme, which is why so many employers have got behind it. Recipients of bursaries regularly say that they would not have entered journalism careers had it not been for the JDF.
27. The scheme’s evolution since 2018 to include mentoring and work experience elements has been hugely beneficial to students and sponsors alike. The NCTJ has plans to expand the work of the scheme to tackle questions around career progression in particular.

### **Partnerships & projects**

28. The NCTJ plays a significant role in training beyond the traditional student and trainee (junior journalist) cohorts.
29. On the one hand, it provides continuous professional development (CPD) to individuals and corporate clients – both via scheduled training events and bespoke short courses. Some of the NCTJ’s strategic partners have worked with us to develop specific, accredited qualifications to use in-house as a means to develop staff skills. Recognising that there is an increasing training gap for in-work journalists, the NCTJ is currently working to expand its CPD offer across the sector beyond its existing qualifications.
30. On the other hand, the NCTJ’s main qualifications (the CFJ, Diploma in Journalism and NQJ) provide the basis for a range of discrete projects. For instance:
  - a. In 2018 the **Community News Project** (CNP) was launched as a partnership between Facebook, the NCTJ and nine regional news publishers, aiming to employ 80 reporters in new community reporter roles to engage with underserved audiences. Each reporter (the first of whom was hired in March 2019) is working towards an NCTJ qualification during the two-year scheme. 68 per cent of reporters on this scheme fulfil one or more diversity criteria established at the project’s outset. As part of the project the NCTJ has developed a new community-focussed pathway through the NQJ (for more information about the CNP please see Appendix 2.).
  - b. Last year the NCTJ worked with Nike and PA Training to develop a programme focussed on **women’s sports journalism**, built around the CFJ. This fully-

funded training course attracted considerable interest and a hugely diverse cohort of participants; it also unearthed a rich seam of talent and may provide a model for future subject-based courses.

- c. This year the NCTJ is working with the disability charity, Ability Today, to deliver a course (once again built around the CFJ qualification) to individuals living with **disabilities**.

## **PART II**

### **The Future of Journalism**

31. The NCTJ welcomes the decision by the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee to hold this present inquiry, which has taken on unexpected prescience in recent weeks.
32. While the subject of journalism's future has plainly been examined by other bodies in the recent past, the challenges facing the news media sector are so significant and so complex that we consider continued focus by policy-makers to be vital.
33. In particular, the NCTJ welcomes the committee's specific focus on training as an important issue facing the sector. We recognise of course that the coronavirus pandemic raises broader questions for the industry; but pre-existing concerns in the training arena have only been heightened by present circumstances. And the potential, pandemic-related consequences for the industry of disruption to quality training could plainly be very problematic.
34. Historically, the news media industry – in both broadcast and print sectors – was able to support training, and fund it, to a very significant degree: both via the old system of indentures and by direct funding of both the NCTJ and individual trainees. That support has come under strain. For instance, fewer junior journalists are taking the NQJ qualification to prove their ability before becoming a senior journalist. While the NCTJ has been able to maintain (and, in fact, grow) its overall revenues by undertaking discrete projects and commercial activities, the economic challenges faced by parts of the news media sector were a concern long before the coronavirus struck.
35. The advent of a new junior journalism apprenticeship, incorporating the NCTJ diploma, has enabled employers to take advantage of training subsidies for non-graduate entrants. However, the fact that the apprenticeship levy cannot be used to cover salary costs has meant that some employers have not taken the apprentice route.
36. When it comes to continuous professional development, approaches vary between employers. However, training budgets have been the subject of cuts in many instances. The NCTJ's ability to fill the gap, by developing an ongoing programme of upskilling for in-work journalists, is likely to depend largely on external funding.
37. Governments have, perhaps with good reason, been wary of offering direct subsidies to privately-owned, commercial news organisations – although others (notably in France) have taken that approach. Indirect support (for instance, via VAT-relief or the Local Democracy Reporter Service funded by the BBC/licence fee) has been welcome but relatively modest. The NCTJ believes that government support for journalism training offers a relatively uncontroversial way to boost the sector, to ensure high standards and to ease one of the industry's financial pressure points.
38. With that in mind, we offer the following responses to the specific questions set out in the call for evidence. The following applies irrespective of (but is made more urgent by) the present pandemic.

**How should journalism be defined and what is its value to society? What is the difference between 'citizen journalism' and other forms of journalism?**

39. Journalism's value to society is hard to understate, as current circumstances are demonstrating. When conducted by knowledgeable professionals, journalism can inform, analyse, provoke and entertain. At its best it should hold power to account, shine a light into dark corners, improve civic and political debate, give a voice to under-represented communities, and offer insights into a wide range of subjects.
40. The distinction between so-called "citizen journalism" and more established parts of the sector has become blurred in recent years. The ability of any individual or group to establish themselves as a purveyor of news or analysis has increased exponentially, thanks to digital advances. Some of these newer entrants to the news media market produce high quality journalism; others do not.
41. It is important not to draw overly simplistic distinctions based on size, scale or modes of presentation. Ultimately, a journalist – or media organisation – should be judged on the quality of output. A commitment to professional training, skills development, standards and regulatory/legal compliance are additional indicators that a journalistic "brand" can be trusted.
42. There is another point to note, which is that journalistic skills are increasingly valued in sectors which are not primarily focussed on news coverage – notably PR and communications. What's more, journalism is increasingly deployed as an in-house skill, for instance by football clubs or corporations which want to engage their customers directly. The value to the wider economy of professional journalism skills can therefore only be judged by looking beyond obvious news media outlets.

**How have digital technologies changed the consumption and production of journalism?**

**Do journalists have access to the training opportunities necessary to adapt to the digital world? How could public policy better support the training of journalists?**

**What are the main challenges for freelance journalists? How could public policy better support them?**

43. It goes without saying that digital technologies have transformed journalism's production and its consumption to a radical extent.
44. From the NCTJ's point of view it has been crucial to ensure that our training remains relevant for journalists in the modern world: most will be working with digital tools from the outset of their careers, and will be engaging audiences on digital platforms, including social media. These changes have not, however, removed the imperative for would-be journalists to have a firm grounding in fundamental skills around news sense, story-telling and ethics.
45. To that end, we have worked with employers and training providers to evolve existing modules within our qualifications, and to develop new ones. Every element of the Diploma in Journalism (aside from shorthand) should be taught with reference to digital journalism, but additionally we have created a dedicated digital module and another that is focussed on the use of data (largely using digital tools).

46. The debate about the ongoing relevance of shorthand as an essential journalistic skill is a reminder that, while the development of digital knowledge is vital, there remains a significant market for the most traditional of talents. The overwhelming majority of students undertaking a diploma course still study shorthand, on the basis that it remains an essential part of the trade for many reporters. As things stand, it is a prerequisite of contemporaneous court reporting and will be until recording devices are permitted. It also gives journalists a huge advantage when interviewing subjects, attending public meetings and undertaking any other activity when taking verbatim notes of speech is required (for instance, live broadcast reports given in the immediate aftermath of a speech or event). While it is true to say that not every journalist uses shorthand, it is also the case that some jobs in journalism cannot be done properly without it.
47. The NCTJ has also been cognisant of the fact that journalists' relationship with their audience has changed, becoming more direct – and potentially more confrontational. These challenges are addressed in our own courses and in the training offered by our accredited centres around the UK. Likewise, the challenge of verifying online sources of information has become key to accuracy in reporting; and is thus, once again, a key factor within NCTJ training courses.
48. All accredited training centres must keep abreast of the requirements of modern newsrooms, where digital tools are used as a matter of course at every stage of the journalistic process. The NCTJ facilitates this by holding regular workshops for tutors at its centres, and by arranging opportunities for tutors to spend time with local media organisations.
49. For journalists who trained in the pre-digital world, opportunities to develop their digital skills are dependent on a range of factors – primarily their employer's willingness to offer training, and their own desire to undertake it. Equally, some newly-qualified staff find that in the early stages of their career they are not putting all the skills they learned into practice on a regular basis (eg court reporting); they can lose confidence in their ability.
50. The NCTJ has a longstanding and regular programme of research. It uses the results of the research to help inform the development of existing or new qualifications, and to assist the media industry better to understand the skills needs of the sector. We know from our research that many journalists believe they have knowledge gaps, primarily in relation to digital skills, but also with regard to fundamental issues including media law<sup>6</sup>.
51. At a time when most news organisations are producing more journalistic content with fewer resources, it can be challenging to find either time or budget to dedicate to in-work training. The potential future impact on career progression, and on overall standards is obvious.
52. The NCTJ offers a range of short courses on a commercial basis, which publishing companies can take advantage of at a corporate level; scheduled training events are available for freelance journalists too, of which there are increasing numbers in the UK. Where possible, we have put on free training events, in partnership with the likes of Google and Facebook, to aid journalists' professional development.
53. The NCTJ is currently developing a new online learning platform through which it can offer its formal qualifications as distance learning options, as well as other teaching resources. This will, if suitable funding can be sourced, be part of a

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<sup>6</sup> *Journalists at Work*, NCTJ, 2018

broader offer that the NCTJ proposes to make around continuous professional development (CPD), working in partnership with its accredited training centres and other expert bodies to deliver skills development across the print, broadcast and digital journalism industry.

54. We believe that direct public funding for the NCTJ's work in the CPD arena would be of considerable benefit to the sector, including the sizable community of freelance journalists who are frequently unable (often for financial reasons) to develop their skills in a formal or semi-formal educational setting. The NCTJ, as a regulated awarding organisation, and as a registered charity, has the track record, the pan-sector expertise and the respect of the industry to warrant such support.
55. Additionally, public policy could better support journalism training by changes to the existing apprenticeship regime, particularly by permitting the use of apprenticeship levy funds to cover staff salaries. Apprentices learn their trade on the job and undertake the NCTJ diploma concurrently; as a non-graduate programme, apprenticeships offer an alternative pathway into industry and can encourage a diverse intake.
56. Given the precarious financial situation which some media companies find themselves in (even more so in the current situation) – and bearing in mind concerns around the diversity of newsrooms – greater support for apprenticeships would plainly be very welcome indeed.
57. The NCTJ hopes that a proposed senior journalist apprenticeship programme (incorporating the NQJ) will be launched this summer. Support for this scheme by news media companies would help employers spread the use of their levy entitlement and encourage a culture of CPD by placing greater emphasis on qualifications that are aimed at in-work journalists.

**What qualifications do professional journalists need? How could public policy better support non-degree routes into journalism?**

58. Journalism is not a licensed profession and it can legally be practised without any specific qualifications. However, 81 per cent of journalists in the UK hold a journalism qualification of some sort. Of these, 81 per cent hold an NCTJ qualification (overwhelmingly this is the Diploma in Journalism). This reflects the fact that the NCTJ is the only awarding body in the UK which specifically develops journalism qualifications based on industry standards: those studying journalism degrees on non-NCTJ accredited courses are less likely to enter the profession.
59. Because the diploma is a flexible qualification it can be taught in a variety of settings, either at undergraduate level, or as part of a Master's degree, or outside the higher education sector.
60. A range of FE colleges and private training providers are thus accredited to teach the diploma as a standalone qualification – either in an academic year context or as a "fast-track" course (taught over 18-22 weeks). Fast-track courses have proved popular among graduates, but they are also available to school-leavers and to career changers.
61. In line with its charitable aim of making training accessible as widely as possible, the NCTJ also offers the diploma directly to students via a distance learning package, which is a cost-effective solution for those prepared to achieve the qualification primarily by self-study.

62. The Diploma in Journalism is also incorporated into the junior journalist apprenticeship standard. Around 170 individuals began apprentice courses in 2019, out of a total of 1,500 individuals studying for the diploma overall.
63. The NCTJ does not take a view as to whether a journalist is better prepared for a career in news media if they study for a degree or do not. Guided by industry, we agree that different routes will suit different individuals: but the best way for an individual to increase their chance of a career in journalism is to undertake the Diploma in Journalism in one format or another. For some parts of the industry, the diploma remains a prerequisite for job applicants; for all sectors, it is a strong indicator that an applicant will have the skills that enable them to be “newsroom ready”.
64. That having been said, the NCTJ believes strongly that there are good reasons to encourage people to consider non-graduate routes into the news media sector, not least to secure a more diverse range of voices and experiences into newsrooms.
65. Apprenticeships offer a particularly attractive alternative to degrees, given that they involve salaried employment and both “on the job” and academic training. The NCTJ worked closely with industry (and IFATE) in the establishment of the existing junior journalist standard, but we are conscious that some employers have been unable or unwilling to take on apprentices because salary costs cannot be recouped from the apprentice levy. Changing that state of affairs would certainly be a helpful public policy intervention.
66. This is particularly so at a time when a new senior apprenticeship standard is about to be launched, which will incorporate the NQJ, the NCTJ’s senior qualification designed in conjunction with industry.

**How can public policy improve media literacy, particularly among those who have a low level of digital literacy?**

67. While the NCTJ’s primary role is in the arena of journalism training, its work in the promotion of that training – and of careers in journalism – touches on questions of media literacy, since understanding the role of the news media (and the markers of journalistic quality) lie at the heart of this important question.
68. In the last year, the NCTJ has stepped up its efforts to promote journalism training and careers to younger age groups, recognising that many schoolchildren never even consider a job in the news media sector because they don’t believe it is for “people like them”. This not only strikes at the question of why journalism has failed to attract talent from diverse backgrounds, but also underscores the need to explain what journalists actually do, and why that matters to people.
69. The NCTJ is currently looking at ways to do more in this arena, in partnership with industry – recognising that other organisations are better-placed to examine and improve media literacy in broader terms.

**Why is the journalism profession not more representative of the population? How could this be addressed?**

70. Research commissioned by the NCTJ in 2017<sup>7</sup> (as part of its ongoing programme of research work) underscored the continuing lack of diversity within the news media sector. Journalists are still overwhelmingly white and middle class and do

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<sup>7</sup> *Diversity in Journalism*, NCTJ, 2017

not represent the variety of backgrounds and experiences of the general public. In an era where trust is at a premium, representative newsrooms are vital.

71. A number of factors have contributed to the lack of plurality:
  - a. In common with other sectors the focus on degrees as a marker of talent has discriminated against those who do not wish to, or cannot afford to, undertake undergraduate courses.
  - b. The cost of journalism training can be prohibitive, even outside a degree context, when courses are cheaper but student finance may not be available. The NCTJ has sought to mitigate this issue by awarding bursaries from its Journalism Diversity Fund to candidates who cannot afford to pay course fees. It has helped 347 individuals since the programme was launched in 2005 and is currently seeking to increase revenue in order to assist more people. (The JDF also features a mentoring programme.)
  - c. The existence of unpaid work experience schemes (while diminishing) continues to favour those who can afford to take up opportunities without remuneration. The NCTJ is currently working with industry partners to reduce this practice still further.
72. While the JDF has been successful in opening industry doors, progression can be difficult for “non-traditional” entrants, with contacts still regarded in some quarters as being as important as qualifications to career advancement. The NCTJ is seeking to enhance its work through the JDF to help people from diverse backgrounds progress into senior positions. It is also working more broadly to promote “qualifications over contacts” in recruitment and career development.
73. Hierarchical newsroom cultures can lead to some individuals feeling excluded. Employers should do more to foster an inclusive atmosphere that values the experiences of all staff and understands the impact of corporate decision-making on individuals, especially those from under-represented groups. The experience of the Community News Project has shown how changes to recruitment practices can encourage more diverse candidates to come forward.

### **Why has trust in journalism declined? How could it be improved?**

74. The NCTJ is cautious about accepting without question bald assertions about declining trust. Ipsos Mori’s annual Veracity Index in both of the last two years found only 26 per cent of the public trusts journalists to tell the truth; hardly a resounding endorsement – but it should be noted that when the survey was first conducted in 1983, the figure was 19 per cent. It has never been higher than the 27 per cent recorded in 2017.
75. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is much greater public debate (or at least, visible public debate) around trust in the news media than at any previous time. Examples of fake news have sown doubt in the minds of consumers, while genuine mistakes are proclaimed as evidence of deliberate efforts to mislead. In some ways, this additional scrutiny of the media has been helpful, albeit that it has created challenges.
76. Efforts around media literacy are likely in the longer term to improve readers’ ability to sort the wheat from the chaff. But trusted news brands must themselves do more to explain transparently how they operate in order that readers and viewers can better understand the factors that underscore journalism’s

trustworthiness. Politicians and other public figures have a role to play too, ensuring they do not use unjustified attacks on journalists for political ends.

77. The use of trust ratings – such as those overseen by independent, external organisations such as News Guard – may offer assistance in distinguishing between reputable and disreputable outlets online.
78. The NCTJ is currently discussing with industry figures whether the employment of NCTJ-qualified journalists might offer a further “kite-marking” opportunity for media organisations which recruit editorial staff who have passed the NCTJ diploma and/or undertake onward training via the NQJ or future CPD programmes currently being developed. Highlighting the professional training that the majority of journalists undertake before they enter the trade should promote trust.

**How can journalists better understand and convey the concerns and priorities of people who do not live in London or other metropolitan hubs?**

79. The widespread journalistic failure to foresee the outcome of the Brexit referendum and other significant political shifts has given rise to a fairly simplistic narrative that journalists *per se* are out of touch with the concerns of the general populous. While it may be true in some instances, the NCTJ would caution against over-generalising.
80. Ultimately, journalists will best understand their audiences and their subjects when they engage with them regularly and deeply. In part this requires a re-emphasis on traditional types of reporting – especially with a focus on community – and on core journalistic skills, notably around sourcing and interrogating information, talking to people and getting out of the newsroom to engage with readers directly.
81. The NCTJ remains committed to teaching fundamental journalistic skills in the digital age through its Diploma in Journalism – from shorthand and story-writing to interviewing techniques and court reporting – precisely because we recognise the need for journalists to understand the world around them, not only to examine it from behind a desk, or through the prism of social media.
82. The Community News Project – a partnership between the NCTJ, Facebook and nine regional news publishers – has demonstrated what can be achieved by undertaking the kind of community journalism which was once commonplace. (See Appendix 2.)

**How can innovation and collaboration help news providers of all types to maintain sustainable business models and adapt what they produce to audience demand?**

83. The Community News Project, funded by Facebook and managed by the NCTJ, shows how collaborative projects can have a positive impact on journalism<sup>8</sup>. The sharing of best practice between a discrete cohort of reporters across publishing groups has afforded insights that benefit from a cross-employer approach.

**Are there any other ways in which public policy could better support journalists and news organisations, now and in the future?**

84. Given that the NCTJ's primary area of expertise is around training, it is natural perhaps that we focus our answer to this question on that subject.
85. Nevertheless, while we recognise that the needs of the news media sector may also require direct intervention, we recognise too that successive governments have – with good reason – been cautious about measures which amount to the direct funding of journalists. That may change in light of the immediate difficulties created by the coronavirus pandemic. But in any event, funding of ancillary services such as training may be a less controversial alternative, while still benefitting news companies significantly. Training should certainly not fall between the cracks when it comes to discussing the needs of the industry.
86. In Part III of our submission, below, we consider in more detail the ways in which public policy interventions might offer best assistance with regard to journalism training and skills development.

**How effectively do university journalism courses prepare students for a career in the industry?**

87. When it comes to university journalism courses preparing students for a journalistic career, the picture is mixed.
88. Courses – at either undergraduate or post-graduate level – which incorporate the NCTJ's Diploma in Journalism plainly give aspiring journalists a practical, benchmarked qualification beyond simply a degree.
89. Some other courses which do not incorporate the diploma also have a strong record of getting students into the industry after graduation.
90. Nevertheless, since the NCTJ Diploma in Journalism remains a prerequisite for employment in some parts of the news media sector, it is clear that those who undertake journalism courses which are not accredited by the NCTJ are reducing their chances of securing a job. That helps to explain why only 26 per cent of all those undertaking a journalism degree at undergraduate level who get a job within six months of graduating do so in the journalism field. The comparable statistic for those undertaking an undergraduate course incorporating the NCTJ diploma is 64 per cent. (The comparable figure for all those taking an NCTJ diploma in whatever setting is 76 per cent.)
91. Indeed, the NCTJ is regularly contacted by graduates who have discovered that their journalism degree has not given them the practical skills they need to gain employment as a journalist. Significant numbers therefore go on to undertake the NCTJ diploma either on a standalone, fast-track course offered by an accredited,

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<sup>8</sup> *Community News Project, Baseline Evaluation Report: Summary*, NCTJ, 2019

independent training provider; or as part of an MA course; or via distance learning directly with the NCTJ.

92. Recognising that these additional costs place a considerable burden on people at the start of their careers, the NCTJ has stepped up its efforts in the last two years to ensure students make informed choices about degree courses. A careers guide produced in 2019 – supported by industry and NCTJ-accredited training providers – was sent to all secondary schools and colleges in the country in paper form, and was made available online at: <https://www.nctj.com/want-to-be-a-journalist/journalism-careers-guide>.
93. In addition, we ran a social media campaign in the period leading up to university applications being made, encouraging prospective journalism students to examine the merits of different courses in detail.

### **How has the graduate job market in journalism changed in recent years? What are the prospects for aspiring journalists?**

94. It is paradox that, at a time of apparent decline in key parts of the news media industry, the number of journalists working in the UK is rising. Data from the British Labour Force Survey reveals that, in 2018, 90,000 people were employed in some capacity as a journalist – up from 58,000 in 2009.
95. While the overall numbers employed in local and regional newspapers have clearly fallen, the establishment of new digital news services has partly made up for the losses. Indeed, news organisations which were once primarily focussed on print are now seeking to grow their digital operations substantially. While online revenues have not yet come close to matching print-era income, this provides further opportunities for employment.
96. There has also been a significant rise in the numbers of people who are doing journalism in non-traditional settings – for instance, working in-house for a sports club or major corporation. These individuals may have a different focus to, say, a reporter working for a traditional news company, but they are nonetheless utilising journalistic skills as a matter of course.
97. Another area of growth is the freelance market. Many individuals undertake casual shifts for, and/or seek commissions from, a wide range of outlets. A significant proportion of freelancers also do non-journalism work alongside their journalistic output. The picture is a complicated one, but it is a key area of concern for the NCTJ in terms of ongoing skills development, and a key reason why government support in the training arena is increasingly important.

### **Is a journalism masters or bachelors degree better preparation for a career in journalism? And is either preferable to a degree in another subject?**

98. The NCTJ's view is strongly that its practical journalism qualification (the Diploma in Journalism), which is developed and updated in conjunction with industry experts, best provides individuals with the skills necessary to undertake entry-level journalism roles in the newsroom.
99. As to whether it is preferable to undertake the diploma within a BA or MA context (or as part of an apprenticeship qualification, or as a standalone qualification), the NCTJ is ultimately agnostic: different routes will suit different individuals. The key is to ensure that the industry-standard, Diploma in Journalism qualification is accessible via various entry points.

100. Not all journalists undertake the diploma. The NCTJ does not seek to argue that the qualification should be mandatory. Yet we know that in an era when trust is at a premium and journalistic integrity has been called into question like never before, professional training (before and/or during a journalist's career) can play a significant role in reassuring audiences that they are undertaking their work with due regard to ethical and legal requirements, and in line with best practice in all areas.

**How easy is it for news organisations to recruit people in technical and business roles?**

101. The NCTJ is not aware of any data which suggests a particular difficulty in hiring recruits into these areas. With regard to business and financial journalism, there is a particular question around diversity of intake, although it is notable that key providers of financial news (for instance, the *Financial Times*, Reuters and Bloomberg) have – perhaps as a consequence of recognising that challenge – been at the forefront of measures to improve the situation, including via backing for the Journalism Diversity Fund.
102. As to journalists who are focussed on technical matters, such as analytics or platform development, some enter the sector from non-editorial backgrounds; others begin in traditional reporting roles or trade magazines but move into technical areas. Knowledge of journalistic fundamentals is vital in these positions. It is also important that journalists have opportunities to develop their technical skills through in-work training.

## **PART III**

### **Proposals for policy-makers**

103. Other parts of the creative industries (notably the screen sectors) have previously benefitted from public funding, in recognition of their value to the UK economy. The British Film Institute's Future Film Skills initiative in 2017 benefitted from £20m of National Lottery funding over five years, plus a £1m annual grant from the Department of Education – in addition to support from partners in industry and in the educational sector. Even putting the additional challenges of the coronavirus pandemic to one side, the NCTJ believes there is a degree of urgency for the journalism sector to be seen through that same lens of support (bearing in mind not only journalism's vital role to democratic accountability and public discourse, but also the value of journalism skills to the broader economy).
104. The news media sector plainly faces economic challenges – some parts of the industry more than others. And while governments have historically (and perhaps understandably) been cautious about direct funding for journalism (especially with regard to private companies), there is a strong case to support – at the least – ancillary services such as training, especially bearing in mind that training budgets have been squeezed in recent times. Ultimately, ensuring that journalists have professional skills helps to secure quality, and to engender trust between the news media and audiences. The present coronavirus crisis has demonstrated just how crucial it is to have professional journalists informing the public during challenging times.
105. As to specific public policy interventions, the NCTJ has a number of proposals which it hopes the Committee might consider.

### **Continuous professional development**

106. The NCTJ plays a significant role in the continuous professional development of journalists, primarily through its senior level qualification, the NQJ. However, the number of people taking the NQJ is in decline (in part due to pressures on training budgets; partly because of the changing nature of career progression in the sector). The NCTJ's offer beyond the NQJ includes a range of events, seminars, bespoke courses and online learning; but due to a lack of funds, it can (for the most part) only be offered on a commercial basis – at a time when training budgets at most media companies have been cut.
107. We propose to move our work in the CPD arena onto a more formal/structured footing. Our plan is supported by the industry via our board of trustees, but it requires external funding if it is to be offered as a charitable endeavour, benefitting the entire sector (including freelancers and "non-mainstream" outlets).
108. Delivery of CPD training throughout the industry would enable us to strengthen existing partnerships both with industry organisations and our accredited training centres (as well as specialist organisations, for instance in the area of fact-checking and verification). It would ensure journalists developed their skills throughout their career (beyond "learning on the job"), and underscore the centrality of standards through learning. We see the proposal as intrinsically collaborative.

## **Support for apprenticeships**

109. The junior journalist apprenticeship (which includes the NCTJ diploma as an integral element) has created a way into industry for people who do not wish (or cannot afford) to undertake degree courses. Many employers have taken advantage of the programme and have seen the benefits on a range of fronts.
110. However, because the apprenticeship levy cannot currently be used to fund salaries, some employers have not felt able to take apprentices on.
111. A senior level apprenticeship (incorporating the NQJ) is due to be launched this year. This will incentivise employers to upskill existing staff. Again, however, the limitations on the use of levy money may be off-putting to some employers.
112. Greater government support for/funding of apprenticeships in journalism would be very welcome. After all, apprenticeships help to address some of the key issues facing the sector: skills development, standards and diversity.

## **Incentivising universities to teach industry-backed qualification**

113. The NCTJ is the only awarding body in the UK which focusses solely on developing and awarding journalism qualifications. We work with the industry (print, digital, broadcast) to ensure the qualifications remain relevant and practical. The Diploma in Journalism, our key pre-entry level qualification, currently prepares around 1,500 students each year for life in a newsroom.
114. At present, 56 courses at 34 training centres are accredited to provide diploma training (variously at universities, FE colleges and independent providers) in a variety of settings (BA, MA, standalone). There is, however, a burden on those centres which teach the diploma – cost of accreditation, exam fees and the risk of student “failure” (the Diploma in Journalism is a challenging qualification, with only 20-30% of students attaining the “gold standard” of all As-Cs and 100 words per minute in shorthand). Yet we know from the available data that students with an NCTJ qualification are much more likely to enter the industry than those without, since editors know they will be able to hit the ground running.
115. A recognition of the importance of this industry standard, and financial incentives for those universities prepared to offer the diploma within their BA or MA programmes would ensure the pipeline of practically-trained talent does not dry up. It would also ensure students are better equipped to choose courses that give them the best chance of career success at the least cost (we note, for instance, that many would-be journalists take the NCTJ Diploma in Journalism *after* having already completed a non-accredited journalism degree because they realise too late that they need an additional qualification to get a job).

## **Backing for the Journalism Diversity Fund**

116. The NCTJ launched the JDF 15 years ago and has supported 347 people from diverse backgrounds (all of whom had financial need) through diploma courses. It is a tried and tested scheme but we are currently seeking to increase revenues to the fund to £500k per year: a) to meet demand for bursaries from deserving would-be students; and b) to develop the scheme so that it can tackle challenges around career progression, not just entry into the sector.
117. A regular contribution from government to this well-established programme (perhaps match-funding industry contributions) would ensure it can remain fit for purpose and offer support to those in need throughout their careers.

### **Raising the profile of journalism in schools**

118. It is abundantly clear that many schoolchildren do not even consider careers in journalism, let alone explore the options around training. The NCTJ is increasingly targeting younger age groups with information about the vital role of journalism in the UK's democracy and about how best to get into the sector; but there remains more to be done. Government support in this arena – for the work done by the NCTJ on behalf of the news media sector, and by others such as The Student View – would also be welcome.

### **Recognising the role of local media companies in training**

119. The local news media sector has for decades been at the forefront of journalism training, demanding high standards of training among entrants and putting scores of trainees through the NQJ programme in order to raise their skills levels before they become senior journalists.
120. Recognition of this valuable role – which remains crucial despite the broad decline in the local print sector – and subsidising of NQJ training would encourage regional media companies to retain their emphasis on early-career skills development as a means to raising standards and building a well-equipped workforce for the whole of the industry. It is notable that many news stories which appear in the national media start out life in the regional press.

## **Appendix 1**

### **NCTJ Strategic partners**

The following organisations are formal, strategic partners of the NCTJ, helping our work by direct funding or in-kind support. Many of these organisations are represented on NCTJ boards and at NCTJ events. We work with numerous other companies across the news media sector on a regular basis.

Archant  
Barnsley Chronicle  
BBC  
Bloomberg  
Bullivant Media  
Chronicle Publications  
Congleton Chronicle  
Daily Mail & General Trust/ Associated Newspapers  
DC Thomson  
The Enquirer Series  
Evening Standard and Independent  
Facebook  
Financial Times  
Google News Initiative  
Henley & South Oxfordshire Standard  
KM Group  
Johnston Press  
Maidenhead Advertiser  
Mark Allen Group  
Methodist Recorder  
Midland News Association  
Newbury Weekly News Group  
Newsquest Media Group  
NLA media access  
Portfolio Publishing  
Press Association  
The Printing Charity  
Reach PLC  
Rotherham & South Yorkshire Advertiser  
Shetland Times  
Sky UK  
Berkshire Media Group  
Teesdale Mercury  
Thomson Reuters

## **Appendix 2**

### **Community News Project**

The Community News Project (CNP) was launched at the start of 2019 as a partnership between nine regional news publishers (Archant, Barnsley Chronicle, Baylis, JPI Media, KM Group, Newbury Weekly News, Newsquest, Midland News Association, Reach), Facebook and the NCTJ.

It was established in recognition of the gap that has arisen between some communities and their local papers as newsrooms have shrunk during the last couple of decades. The journalists recruited under the project's banner are employed by one of the publishing companies noted above, and each is studying towards an NCTJ qualification alongside their reporting work – mostly the Diploma in Journalism, with around two dozen working towards their NQJ.

The majority are dedicated to a geographic patch (identified as being previously “underserved”); others to a particular demographic group – but all are focussed on the notion of community, engaging with local people and providing them with a voice.

In this endeavour, using up to date technology is crucial. Whether by making video packages on their smartphones or establishing community networks via Facebook, digital skills matter both in rooting out stories and in showcasing them in a way that encourages positive audience engagement. The Community News Project has not only sought to give the newly-recruited reporters the tools they need to flourish in this regard but has also encouraged the onward transmission of skills learnt to newsroom colleagues.

On the other hand, for many of the community reporters, deploying traditional methods in their work has been as, if not more, important: walking the high streets, meeting people week after week to chat about what they are doing, getting into regular routines on their patches.

An additional aim of the programme was to encourage a diverse cohort of journalists into the industry. Thanks to changes in recruitment practices, the participating publishers were ultimately able to take on a cohort which was significantly more representative than journalism has been in recent times. 68 per cent met one or more of the diversity criteria set for the project (around ethnicity, socio-economic and educational background, disability and sexuality).

Since the CNP reporters started in post from March 2019, they have been responsible for hundreds of front page stories in print, and thousands of online articles, showing that there remains an appetite for community news – and an appetite within communities to engage with trusted reporters.

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