

National Council for the  
Training of Journalists

## ACCREDITATION STANDARD AND INFORMATION PACK

*Working in partnership with you  
to train and develop  
the journalists of tomorrow*

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

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## WHAT WE DO

The National Council for the Training of Journalists accredits more than 69 journalism courses at 39 universities and colleges and at commercial and in-house training centres right across the UK.

The courses are delivered to post A-level, undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and trainees already working in journalism on a full-time, part-time, day release and block release basis, over periods ranging from 12 weeks to four years.

Students on these courses study for the NCTJ Diploma in Journalism which is made up of five mandatory modules: reporting, portfolio, essential public affairs, essential media law, and shorthand. They must also complete two of the six specialist options, which are: media law court reporting, sports journalism, video journalism for online, business of magazines, production journalism, and broadcast journalism. Knowledge in these subjects is assessed by exams set by the NCTJ that offer five graded levels of achievement:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Marks</u>
A	70% +
B	60 - 69%
C	50 - 59%
D	40 - 49%
E	30 - 39%
F (fail)	0 - 29%

Candidates who earn their Diploma in Journalism need to achieve A to C grade passes in all the mandatory exams, plus – where applicable – a shorthand speed of 100wpm in order to become eligible to progress to sit the NCTJ's final qualification, the National Certificate Examination (NCE). This is usually taken after 18 months' employment as a trainee and is deemed by most editors to be the best proof that trainees are ready to qualify as senior journalists. While students are offered NCTJ exams at lower shorthand speeds (60 to 90wpm), they should be aware that these may not be acceptable to prospective employers.

For more information on the NCTJ please visit our website at [www.nctj.com](http://www.nctj.com).

## NCTJ AND THE INDUSTRY

Journalism is changing – and so are journalists.

Thanks to the internet, the way news is disseminated is undergoing a revolutionary transformation. Almost all newspaper and magazine publishers and radio and television broadcasters now have an online version of their product with websites that borrow from all the traditional media to tell stories – text, still pictures, audio and moving images. Where once there were distinctive differences between newspaper journalists, magazine journalists and broadcasters, the 21<sup>st</sup> century journalist is expected to work in several mediums instead of just one.

However, amid all this change, one key thing remains constant – the need to acquire the fundamental skills of good journalism. Without the ability to spot a story and compile an accurate and balanced report, no one can prosper in what has now become largely a graduate profession but where a degree alone is unlikely to be enough to gain entry.

That's where the NCTJ fits in.

### *What they say about the NCTJ*

*“We are the biggest employer of trainee journalists in the provincial press. We recruit mainly from those who have taken an NCTJ course. While they are with us they work towards the NCTJ’s National Certificate Examination (NCE).” – David Rowell, group editorial development executive, Johnston Press*

*“Reporting is a simple craft requiring certain basics: curiosity, cheek and never, ever giving up. Whenever I’m asked by teenagers about how they can get into journalism I tell them to head for the nearest town or city which has an NCTJ course.” – Margareta Pagano, business editor, Independent on Sunday & former NCTJ trainee*

*“The course was time well spent in every sense of the word. It is excellent preparation for the industry and worth three times as much as on-the-job experience.” – John Pienaar, chief political correspondent, BBC Radio 5 Live & former NCTJ trainee*

*“What an NCTJ course gives aspiring journalists is a solid foundation for a reporting career, the basics of the job, whether they end up in newspapers, radio or television.” – Mark Austin, co-presenter, ITV News at Ten & former NCTJ trainee*

*“I’m most proud of getting my 100 words per minute shorthand – the toughest exam I’ve ever done.” – Andrew Porter, political editor, Daily Telegraph & former NCTJ trainee*

*“The teaching on the MA was brilliant, completely changed the way I wrote and showed me how to look for the real story when a person is talking. My studies easily saw me through my NCTJ exams and I wouldn’t have got my job without those.” – Katharine Barney, city hall reporter, London Evening Standard & former NCTJ trainee*

*“I am passionate about the importance of training and still rely on much of what I learned back then, especially the basic principles of constructing a good story.” – Lindsay Nicholson, editorial director, Good Housekeeping & former NCTJ trainee*

Through our examinations and the courses we accredit, we help equip would-be journalists to find their first job by providing them with the basic vocational skills that editors want.

How do we know what they want?

Because we consult with them constantly, and because they play an active role in designing and revising our syllabuses and exams.

That's why NCTJ qualifications are the most common in the UK journalism industry, accounting for almost two out of three journalists who either hold a professional qualification, are working towards one, or who attended an accredited course but failed to qualify.

That's why major media groups and other journalist employers, including many broadcasters, say they prefer NCTJ qualified applicants.

That's why hundreds of students sit our exams every year, and why many successful journalists in all media - including people like John Humphrys, Geordie Greig, Nick Owen, Mark Austin, Piers Morgan, Jeremy Clarkson, Sally Magnusson and John Williams - are thankful for their NCTJ qualification.

**What surveys show**

*Source: Journalists at Work, 2002  
Journalism Training Forum*

The survey polled 1,238 journalists working in working for national and regional newspapers, magazines, television, radio and other news media. More than half the respondents held a professional journalism qualification.

Hold a journalism qualification	58%
Working towards a journalism qualification	3%
Do not hold a journalism qualification	38%
Don't know	2%

Respondents who had either got a qualification, were working towards a qualification or who had attended a journalism course but not got the qualification were asked who approved or accredited the qualification or course

NCTJ	64%
Internal company scheme	9%
Periodicals Training Council (PTC)	8%
Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC)	7%
NVQ	6%
Overseas, non-UK qualification	3%
Other	6%
None of the above	1%

Base: 812

*Source: PSG Graduate Apprenticeship Survey 2005*

A survey of 202 journalist employers across the newspaper, magazine and broadcasting sectors found that of the 70 percent who recruit new entrants into journalism straight from education, nearly three quarters (73 percent) look for industry-accredited qualifications.

While, as might be expected, most broadcasting respondents expressed a preference for the BJTC qualification, a significant minority (one in five) of broadcasting employers said they preferred NCTJ qualified recruits.

*Preference for industry-accredited qualifications*

	All %	Newspapers %	Broadcasting %
NCTJ	31	85	21
NVQ	*	1	0
PTC	*	1	0
BJTC	48	0	59
No Pref	20	14	19
Don't know	2	0	1
Base	88	63	17

*\* indicates the value is less than 0.5 percent*

## ACCREDITATION OF JOURNALISM COURSES

NCTJ accreditation is *the* hallmark of excellence in journalism training, providing a world-class standard that is recognised and sought-after throughout the media industry.

Achieving our accreditation will make your course more appealing to students looking for a career in journalism, and make your students more appealing to employers looking for multi-skilled recruits who know the fundamentals of journalism and can operate effectively in a busy newsroom environment.

But if these benefits are to mean anything, we need to be sure that students and employers are not short changed, and that an NCTJ accredited course does exactly what it says on the tin by delivering vocational training to a high standard that everyone who cares about the quality of journalism understands and values.

So what are we looking for in an accredited journalism course? The NCTJ believes that overall programme structure and methods of teaching should be left to experts at the universities, colleges and commercial and in-house training centres who deliver courses. Our role is to:

- satisfy ourselves that the NCTJ syllabus is delivered effectively and in full with an appropriate balance between academic and vocational modules so that students leave the course able to practice journalism as well as being able to analyse and reflect on it
- encourage the provision of courses that will equip students to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century newsroom environment with its emphasis on multi-media platforms and skills convergence, and where the regulations governing the behaviour and practice of journalists will remain under constant review
- work in partnership with course providers to maintain and update an accreditation system that is both focused on quality, “real world” journalism skills and flexible enough to accommodate creative, added-value initiatives.

As an awarding body, recognised by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual), we set high standards. But that doesn't mean we insist on you having to jump through hoops to win our endorsement. We believe working towards accreditation should be a worthwhile, meaningful exercise based on collaboration and practical support.

To help you speed up the application process and iron out any potential problems, we recommend at least one pre-accreditation advisory visit. We are always available to discuss any queries you may have over the phone or by email, and you can keep abreast of the latest developments via our website and our eJournalism newsletter.

We're confident that the majority of centres who offer NCTJ-accredited courses will agree that our accreditation process, while challenging, is fair, reasonable, and professional. To ensure that it stays that way and that we validate our licence to operate, the NCTJ is committed to a programme of continuous improvement based on regular discussions with all our partners – course leaders, students and editors. We welcome your ideas and feedback.

As the media world continues to change, so too does the NCTJ. We've already introduced substantial improvements covering all aspects of the organisation, including accreditation. Many of these changes are challenging and will require new ways of thinking and working – but every move we've made, and will make in the future, has just one purpose: to maintain the highest standards of journalism.

We look forward to receiving your completed accreditation application and to working with you in the future.



## ACCREDITATION OF JOURNALISM COURSES

### THE INDUSTRY STANDARD

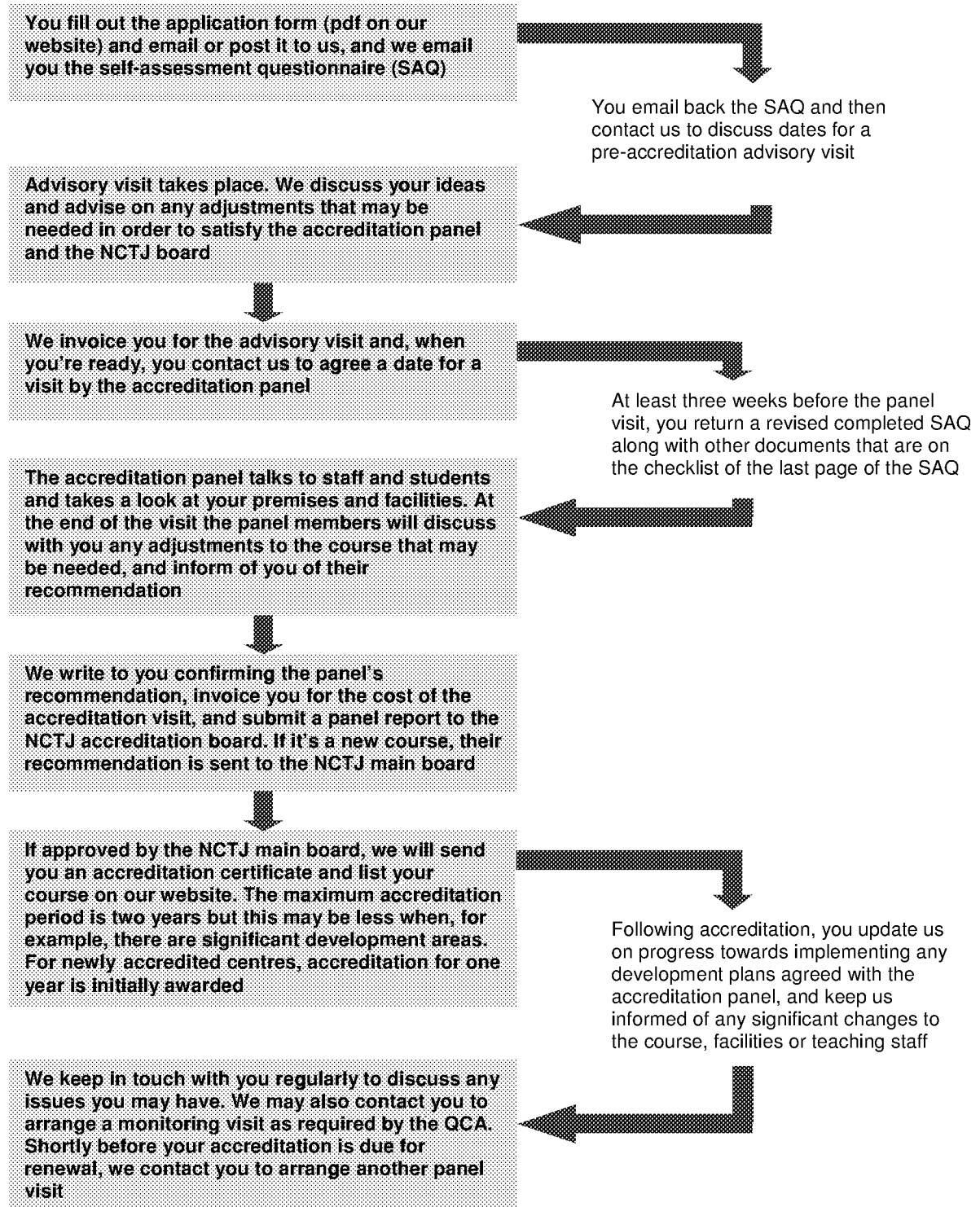
PRINCIPLES	AIMS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p><b>Recruitment</b></p> <p>The NCTJ is committed to accrediting courses where there is effective recruitment and selection of students who will readily find jobs and be able to maintain the high standards of UK journalism in the future</p>	<p><b>1.</b> To accredit courses that are promoted clearly and compellingly to students seeking a vocational qualification that is widely recognised and highly valued by journalism employers</p>	<p>♦1. Promotional materials and/or course literature explain the purpose, scope and distinctive nature of NCTJ qualifications, and the exacting standards required to pass the preliminary examinations in journalism</p>
	<p><b>2.</b> To accredit courses where students are selected on the basis of ability and the potential to succeed in a career in journalism</p>	<p>♦1. Students are selected on the basis of an interview and the NCTJ's aptitude test (or a similar test devised by the course provider and endorsed by the NCTJ) that assess the traditional qualities demanded of journalists</p> <p>or....</p> <p>♦Where interviews and entrance tests are not feasible, there is a robust selection process which uses personal statements and other available information to identify applicants who possess the personal qualities required to operate effectively as journalists</p>
	<p><b>3.</b> To accredit courses that are committed to fostering a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment regardless of class, gender, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, disability, or particular needs</p>	<p>♦1. There are equal opportunities, health &amp; safety and particular needs policies in place that adhere to current convention and practice</p> <p>♦2. There are buildings for assessment purposes that provide access for all candidates.</p>

PRINCIPLES	AIMS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p><b>Teaching &amp; Learning</b></p> <p>The NCTJ is committed to accrediting courses that deliver journalism teaching and learning opportunities of the highest standard and based on industry requirements</p>	<p><b>4.</b> To accredit courses where the NCTJ syllabus is delivered effectively and in full by knowledgeable and experienced teaching staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆1. Schemes of work reflecting the requirements of the NCTJ syllabus</li> <li>◆2. The course achieves at least a 50% A-E grade pass rate in each NCTJ exam plus at least a 50% pass rate at a minimum of 60wpm for shorthand - the 50% threshold to be based on the total number of students graduating from the accredited course.</li> <li>◆3. Staff CVs demonstrating newsroom and/or relevant subject experience</li> <li>◆4. NCTJ self-assessment questionnaire; external examiner(s)' reports; and/or internal quality assurance policies</li> </ul>
	<p><b>5.</b> To accredit courses where there is an integrated approach to teaching with formal classroom tuition linked to practical journalism that reflects developments in media convergence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆1. Course newspapers, magazines web pages etc., and/or marked exercise copy demonstrating students' knowledge of news writing, media law &amp; public affairs</li> <li>◆2. Schemes of work, e.g., newdays or work placements, that show students practice 'real world' journalism operating within tight deadlines and adhering to professional codes and standards</li> <li>◆3. There are court and council visits and these are linked to the production of news material</li> <li>◆4. Adequate newsroom, computer facilities and equipment and a range of newspapers and magazines to enable students to practice their journalism skills and take their exams</li> <li>◆5. Students are encouraged to gain work experience and there is sufficient time allowed for this.</li> <li>◆6. A broad range of guest speakers made up of those who work as journalists and who interact regularly with journalists</li> </ul>



PRINCIPLES	AIMS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p><b><i>Control &amp; Evaluation</i></b></p> <p>The NCTJ is committed to accrediting courses that apply effective control and evaluation systems</p>	<p><b>6.</b> To accredit courses whose providers are dedicated to a culture of continuous improvement based on a well-developed and coherent quality management process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆1. There are effective quality assurance procedures to deal with complaints and to monitor and act on student attendance, achievement and progression</li> <li>◆2. Information is available on students' journalism-related first job destinations</li> <li>◆3. Students have access to transparent information on fees and available bursaries</li> <li>◆4. There is positive feedback from students past and present and editors on the way the course is managed and delivered</li> <li>◆5. Students are encouraged to elect a representative to attend NCTJ student council meetings</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Administration</i></b></p> <p>The NCTJ is committed to accrediting courses where staff meet the administrative requirements associated with the delivery of professional qualifications</p>	<p><b>7.</b> To accredit courses where staff are able to carry out the required administrative and examination functions in a timely and professional manner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆1. Examination papers are marked accurately and consistently to the NCTJ's marking guidelines</li> <li>◆2. Examination sessions are conducted and invigilated in accordance with conventional practice</li> <li>◆3. Students are registered promptly for examinations; NCTJ exam fees are collected and paid on time; and examination results are distributed to students as soon as they are available</li> <li>◆4. Teaching staff attend NCTJ marking workshops and exam board seminars on a regular basis</li> <li>◆5. Course leaders and/or heads of journalism make every effort to attend the various annual forums held by the NCTJ to discuss and receive feedback on qualification and accreditation issues</li> </ul>

## THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS



## WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU FOR ACCREDITATION

Once we have met with you on an advisory visit to discuss your course plans and you feel that you are ready, we will agree a date for a visit by our accreditation panel. The panel will include at least one NCTJ representative and normally two editors or senior journalists.

At least three weeks before the visit we would like you to send us by email documentary evidence to show that your course is ready for accreditation. We don't need reams of paper, just clear evidence that you have understood and are committed to implementing the NCTJ's industry standard for journalism courses. While courses applying for accreditation for the first time will not be able to produce all of the evidence, generally we will expect your application documentation to include:

- Self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ). This is a standard requirement for all courses seeking to gain or retain accreditation. Information (space is provided for additional comments) in the SAQ helps the panel members assess the extent to which the course is able to meet the terms of the NCTJ's accreditation standard. First-time applicants will not be able to complete all sections of the questionnaire but please provide as much information as possible. The SAQ must be completed on-screen and returned to the NCTJ as an email attachment.
- Student/ course handbook
- NCTJ module descriptors/ schemes of work
- Student timetable
- Centre's own entrance test (if applicable)
- Examples of promotional materials and/or course literature which indicate that the purpose, scope, cost and distinctive nature of NCTJ qualifications have been explained clearly to those enquiring about the course and to those who have joined it
- CVs (in summary form) of tutors who will be delivering NCTJ modules
- Names and first job destinations of recently graduating students
- The most recent external examiner's report
- A timetable for the panel visit (Unless otherwise agreed with the NCTJ, please assume panel visits will start at 11am and finish by 3pm with the centre providing a half-hour sandwich lunch.)

- A location map of your centre, travel directions by car and train, and car parking instructions

The NCTJ needs to receive these documents by email by at least 15 working days in advance of the panel visit.

### **Accreditation panel visit**

The accreditation panel's visit will last for four hours and normally starts at 11am with panel members meeting briefly in private to discuss arrangements for the day.

Please arrange a half-hour sandwich lunch for the panel members. During their visit the panel members will want to:

- Meet with the course leader and key staff to discuss accreditation documents, NCTJ exam take-up and performance and other issues
- Meet in private with as many students as possible

Please have on hand the following, should panellists want to examine them:

- A representative range of materials (course newspapers or magazines, news web pages, online video packages) produced by current and/or immediately previous cohorts of students
- Samples of marked journalism exercise copy

### **Accreditation period**

Centres working towards accreditation for the first time can apply for approval as an NCTJ exam centre for a period of up to three years. Centres must complete an advisory visit and provide annual evidence that progress with accreditation is being made.

Accreditation is granted for a maximum of two years. In some instances the panel may recommend accreditation for a shorter period subject to certain conditions being met within a specified time. New courses, for example, can expect to be granted accreditation for one year, until results for some or all NCTJ exams have been assessed. Similarly courses where certain elements require attention or adjustment will be offered accreditation strictly on condition that remedial action is taken within the time specified by the panel. The NCTJ reserves the right to not renew accreditation at the end of the accreditation term.

Monitoring visits may be carried out at any time during the accreditation term to check that examination guidelines are being adhered to, and to discuss any other

issues that may require attention. Withdrawal of accreditation will not adversely affect any student already enrolled on the course concerned.

We will contact you in advance to remind you that re-accreditation is due so that you have time to gather the documentation we will need before another panel visit.

## **Exams outcomes and results tables**

Accreditation is only awarded to those providers who meet (and continue to meet) the Industry Standard for journalism courses – a key performance indicator being at least a 50 percent (based on the number of graduating students) A-E grade pass rate in each core NCTJ exam plus (where applicable) at least a 50 percent pass rate at a minimum shorthand speed of 60wpm.

The NCTJ believes that all students on any course it accredits should enter and pass our professional exams in addition to any assessments required by the course provider. It is these exams that distinguish NCTJ-accredited journalism courses from the many others on offer, and the Diploma in Journalism is what the overwhelming majority of employers want their trainees to possess.

Accreditation will not be appropriate for those courses that seek to use our kite mark solely for marketing purposes but which lack sufficiently robust recruitment criteria, motivation and support to ensure adequate take-up of the NCTJ's professional exams.

## **Removal of accreditation**

Accreditation is removed only as a last resort or where performance falls seriously short of the required standard. Before that stage, failing courses will normally be put “under review” in a process that allows us to work with them to agree a series of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) objectives. When providers decline to co-operate with the NCTJ, accreditation will be removed in a way that allows students already on course to complete their NCTJ qualifications. The NCTJ reserves the right to remove accreditation at any time in exceptional circumstances. Centres previously running an accredited course within the last three years may apply for NCTJ exam centre status subject to meeting conditions of approval.

Academic centres should note that the NCTJ no longer accredits pathways within journalism degree courses where only those students who elect to join an “NCTJ

pathway” enter NCTJ exams. Only whole courses leading to a named and specific award can be considered for accreditation.

Just as we believe that course providers should be able to make a fully informed choice about whether or not to seek accreditation, so we believe students are entitled to make an informed choice about which course is right for them.

To that end the NCTJ publishes annually on its website results tables showing the take up and exam pass rates for every accredited journalism course.

## **Administration responsibilities**

Accredited journalism course providers work in partnership with the NCTJ and that means sharing administrative responsibilities. If you are granted accreditation you will be expected to:

- Meet the deadlines for registering your students to sit NCTJ exams and ordering portfolios on their behalf; collect and pay exam fees to the NCTJ (refer to the fees list on the website for costs)
- Provide appropriate invigilators and facilities for your students to sit exams on dates set by the NCTJ
- Mark media law and public affairs exams and assess student portfolios using our marking guidelines, and business of magazines where appropriate (the NCTJ pays a fee for each portfolio/exam paper marked).
- Attend marking workshops and subject seminars organised by the NCTJ
- Distribute exam results to your students
- Liaise regularly with the NCTJ exams team

## **Accreditation fees**

Our accreditation fees are as follows, and include 20% VAT:

- **Annual membership** = £759.58
- **Accreditation panel visit** = £510.65
- **Advisory or monitoring visit** = £348.52
- **New centre accreditation** = £759.58