

SQA case study

George Pascoe-Watson, political editor of *The Sun* (2006-2009): HND Practical Journalism, Napier College, 1986

“I had my heart set on being a journalist from about the age of 16 and chose to do the HND at Napier when I left school. It was a controversial choice because it was in its inaugural year. However, it was the right decision.

“The course was difficult, especially law and shorthand – I actually failed the law exam. Shorthand was my lifesaver, though – it was without a doubt the single most important thing I learned at college. Without it, I would never have been able to apply for a job after leaving. You can have the best grades in every other subject but if you haven’t got shorthand, no one in journalism will employ you. It’s a pain, but you can’t operate without it.

“When I left, I applied for dozens of jobs. I sent about 50 letters to local newspapers in Scotland and England. Eventually, I got a job at the *Warminster Journal* in Wiltshire and was paid £63 a week, in cash. From there I moved to the *Bristol Journal* and then on to a news agency.

“My big break was when I wrote a story about a postman who’d delivered a baby during his rounds. That was picked up by *The Sun*, and I eventually moved to London and got a staff job working for them.

“The highlight of my career was to become political editor of *The Sun* at the age of 39. This was easily the biggest job in newspapers, aside from actually being an editor, as *The Sun* is the biggest-selling daily paper in the UK. The political influence I had was a huge responsibility and I had to exercise formidable judgment at all times. Interviewing two prime ministers at Chequers, masterminding *The Sun*’s coverage of the Iraq war from US central command in Qatar, forging a strong relationship with David Cameron and invading Paris in a tank for *The Sun*’s anti-Euro campaign remain particularly strong memories.

“If I was just starting out, I’d do it all the same again. The HND kick-started my career in journalism. It’s a difficult line of work to get into, but very enjoyable. Just make sure you learn shorthand!”