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NEW EXAMS MANAGERS/OFFICERS: A GUIDE TO STARTING YOUR NEW ROLE

One of the biggest challenges for anyone new to the exams manager/officer role is knowing what is expected of them and which tasks they need to prioritise during their first few weeks in post.

The exams manager/officer plays a pivotal role in every centre. Well-managed examinations are fundamental to ensuring that students have every opportunity to achieve their academic potential.

With responsibility for coordinating complex processes, meeting critical deadlines and ensuring compliance with examination regulations, the role requires a clear understanding of what needs to be done and when.

In this article, we outline a range of areas, tasks and information which a new exams managers/officers should be aware of/tackle during their first weeks/months in post.

Induction

Unfortunately, many centres do not have a structured approach to inducting and supporting a new exams manager/officer.

Without a thorough induction, those new to the role can find it difficult to understand their responsibilities, identify priorities and navigate the many processes involved in managing examinations.

To help centres address this, The Exams Office provides the [New Exams Manager/Officer Induction: Task Completion Checklist](#). This practical guide provides a structured starting point, helping new exams managers/officers understand the key tasks they should be undertaking and the actions they need to complete during their initial weeks in post.

Upon appointment, a new exams manager/officer should also begin the [The Exams Office New Exams Manager/Officer Induction and Assessment Module](#). The module is designed to support the centre's induction process and provide a clear introduction to the exams manager/officer role, its responsibilities and the knowledge required to perform it effectively.

Together, these resources provide a structured foundation for a new exams manager/officer, helping them to build confidence, understand their responsibilities and establish good practice from the outset.

Training

- Dependent on when you are appointed, look to attend [New exams manager/officer training](#) events

Support – Internal and external

As a new exams manager/officer, you should access the wide range of support which is available both within your centre and from organisations within the wider exams community.

Internal (including roles and responsibilities)

- Head of Centre/Senior Leadership Team
 - Ensure you have access to appropriate training, support and sufficient time to perform your role
 - Ensure you have appropriate line management from a member of the senior leadership team
- Line Manager – ideally a member of the Senior Leadership Team
 - Provide effective line management, supervision and support
 - Help you make decisions in line with JCQ and awarding body regulations
 - Approve and support professional development, including training, conferences and network meetings
 - Develop, approve and annually review exam-related policies and procedures
 - Support with candidate/parent enquiries and resolve issues with other staff
- Heads of Year/Pastoral Leads
 - Provide pastoral and candidate information
 - Support with candidate and parent enquiries
- Heads of Department/Subject Leads
 - Provide academic and candidate information
- SENCo (or equivalent role)
 - Provide information about candidate access arrangements
 - Support or lead training for staff facilitating access arrangements
 - Support the submission and processing of access arrangement approval applications and adjustments
- IT Staff
 - Support the preparation and delivery of on-screen examinations
 - Support the use of assistive technology in examinations and assessments
- Facilities Staff
 - Support the preparation and setup of examination rooms
- Reception Staff
 - Support the receipt and secure handling of confidential examination materials
 - Assist with the dispatch of examination scripts
- Invigilators
 - Conduct examinations in accordance with JCQ regulations

External

Identify support/information from:

- DfE
- Ofqual
- Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) – including the range of documentation which is relevant for exams managers/officers
- Awarding bodies
- The Exams Office – see [New exams manager/officer support](#)
- National Association of Examinations Officers (NAEO)

Visit websites to acquire resources and support materials. You should also subscribe (where needed) for updates/newsletters/emails, etc.

Terminology

Managing examinations and assessments involves a wide range of terms and acronyms, some of which may be unfamiliar to those new to the role, such as UCI, EDI, tier and private candidate.

To help you become familiar with the terminology used in examinations, The Exams Office provides a **Key Terms Glossary** to help you navigate and understand the ‘language’ of exams and assessments (available in the [Hub](#)).

Key tasks

Effective planning is essential for managing examinations successfully. Download and use The Exams Office [monthly support guides](#) and [termly checklists](#) to support your planning and preparation throughout the academic year. These provide an overview of key tasks and recommend good practice for the autumn, spring and summer terms. The Exams Office **Diary** and **Wall Planner** can also support your daily, weekly and termly planning.

You should also create an [Exams Manual](#) containing key information and documents relevant to the management and administration of examinations and assessments at your centre. Organise the manual into clear sections, including:

- **General Information** – key dates and timetables, annual exams and qualification plans, stakeholder contact details, and information relating to the management and administration of examinations
- **Key Documents** – documents required for each examination series, organised by academic term or the five stages of the exam cycle
- **Compliance** – information relating to compliance with JCQ and awarding body regulations and requirements, including JCQ Centre Inspection Service reports
- **Policies and Procedures** – all relevant centre examination policies and procedures
- **Invigilation** – information relating to the training and management of invigilators

- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD)** – documentation relating to the CPD of staff involved in the management and administration of examinations and assessments

Key Dates

Identify the key dates and deadlines that apply to your centre. These can be obtained from:

- Awarding body websites
- [JCQ website](#)
- The Exams Office [Key Dates Calendar Tool](#), which allows you to create a customised calendar using key dates provided by JCQ and contributing awarding bodies

Annual Exams Plan

Create an [Annual Exams Plan](#) to provide a clear overview of the activities and events that will affect your role throughout the academic year. A well-structured plan will help you:

- Plan and prepare effectively
- Reduce the risk of missing key tasks and deadlines
- Identify where additional support may be required
- Support risk assessment and contingency planning

Discuss your plan with your line manager or relevant senior leader and make sure you are kept informed of any decisions or events that could affect it.

Your plan should be concise but comprehensive, covering:

- Key tasks, deadlines and dates linked to the exam cycle
- External examination and assessment periods
- Internal examination and assessment periods
- External events, such as training, conferences and network meetings
- Internal events, such as invigilator training, parents' evenings and sports day
- Centre holiday dates

An **Annual Exams Plan template** is available from The Exams Office Hub, and its Wall Planner can also be used to support your planning.

Annual Qualifications Plan

Create an [Annual Qualifications Plan](#) to identify all qualifications being delivered at your centre that will be examined or assessed during the academic year. This will help you plan and complete essential tasks within the exam cycle, including making entries.

To create the plan, gather information from the relevant members of staff for each qualification, including:

- Awarding body
- Qualification type and specification title

- Entry codes
- Cohorts or year groups taking the qualification, together with an estimated number of students
- The examination or assessment series in which the qualification will be taken

The Exams Office [Information Gathering Form](#) can be used to help collect this information.

Sharing exam and assessment information

Make sure you understand what examination and assessment information must be shared with staff, candidates, parents and carers, and when it needs to be communicated.

JCQ regulations require centres to share a range of examination and assessment-related information and guidance. Meet with your line manager to agree how and when this information will be communicated and clarify your own responsibilities within the process.

The **JCQ Documents Checklist** (available in the Hub) can be used to identify the JCQ documents and information that need to be signposted to or shared with staff, candidates and parents.

Confidential exam materials

Ensure that you understand the JCQ requirements for the secure receipt, movement, checking and storage of question papers and other confidential examination materials. These requirements are set out in sections 1–5 of the JCQ [Instructions for conducting examinations](#) document.

Confidential materials must be stored at the centre's registered address in a secure room with an appropriate secure storage facility, such as a safe or security cabinet.

You should also make sure you understand the requirements for the secure room and storage facility, including who has access to them and the responsibilities of keyholders.

Centre policies and procedures

Work with your line manager or senior leader to review and update relevant examination policies and procedures annually.

Examination-related policies and procedures generally fall into two categories, those:

- Required by JCQ
- Developed by the centre to reflect best practice or address specific needs, such as procedures for managing late-arriving candidates or disruptive behaviour

Use The Exams Office [Policy/Procedures Checklist](#) to help confirm that appropriate policies and procedures are in place, meet JCQ requirements and identify opportunities to strengthen existing practice.

While exams managers/officers will not have sole responsibility for developing or maintaining centre policies, they will typically contribute to policies and procedures relating

directly to the management and delivery of examinations and assessments. These may include:

- Contingency planning
- Internal appeals
- Malpractice
- The use of word processors in examinations
- Candidate identification
- Emergency evacuation of the examination room
- Requests for post-results services

The Exams Office also provide:

- Certain policies and procedures in editable MS Word format templates
- The [Policy Generator Tool](#), which provides interactive templates for creating a range of policies and procedures

Access arrangements

The SENCo (or equivalent role) is responsible for making appropriate and informed decisions about access arrangements in accordance with JCQ regulations. The SENCo must work with teaching staff, support staff and exams office personnel to ensure that approved access arrangements and reasonable adjustments are implemented appropriately, including for mock examinations.

Meet with your SENCo or equivalent to:

- Agree roles and responsibilities, including processing approval applications, deadlines, informing students and ensuring facilitators and invigilators are appropriately trained (see [The Exams Office January 2026 article](#))
- Identify candidates requiring access arrangements and confirm which arrangements need to be in place
- Prepare for upcoming examinations and assessments where access arrangements or modified papers are required, including November examinations and/or mock examinations.

Invigilators

Invigilators play a vital role in maintaining the integrity and security of examinations and assessments. As exams manager/officer, you should ensure that the centre's arrangements meet JCQ requirements.

See The Exams Office website for a range of [invigilation support resources](#).

Your responsibilities should include:

- Evaluating the current invigilation team
- Developing a recruitment plan if additional invigilators are required
- Managing invigilator training

You should also ensure that invigilators:

- Understand what is expected of them
- Receive thorough training on current regulations
- Receive updates on regulatory changes where appropriate
- Undergo rigorous testing of their competence and understanding of the regulations

Invigilators should be familiar with the relevant JCQ documents, including:

- *Instructions for conducting examinations* (ICE)
- *Checklist for invigilators (for written examinations)*
- *Warning to candidates* poster
- *Unauthorised items* poster

They must also understand your centre-specific arrangements, including the emergency evacuation procedure and procedures for verifying candidate identity.

Finally, consider developing a clear **invigilator recruitment strategy**, identifying where, when and how additional invigilators will be recruited.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (End of August 2026)