

The role of the Head of Centre in supporting their Exams Officer

In the Joint Council for Qualifications' 2018/19 [General Regulations](#) booklet, an addition has been made which may be one of the most significant changes for Exams Officers in recent years.

In section 5.3 (page 11) of this publication, it is stated that:

"It is the responsibility of the head of centre to ensure that his/her centre...enables the examinations officer to receive appropriate training and support in order to facilitate the effective delivery of examinations and assessments within the centre."

The Exams Officer community has long asked for support from the relevant authorities in supporting colleagues – new and experienced - in their centres whilst undertaking their everyday role. However, since the demise of the NAA/EDSU support team, and a lack of any support from any other organisations (including those funded by the DfE with the sole aim of supporting the Exams Officer community), an increasing number of Exams Officers have found the role increasingly difficult to perform as a consequence of their working conditions within their centre.

These have included over half of all Exams Officers undertaking an additional role, and approximately 1 in 3 Exams Officers being appointed within the last 12 months, and consequently, there has never been a more urgent need for Exams Officers to receive the support they require to undertake the role – and for this reason, the JCQ should be applauded for stipulating that there is a responsibility upon Heads of Centres to ensure that there is appropriate training and support for their Exam Officer.

With employment contracts agreed at centre level in most cases, it is difficult for the JCQ and awarding bodies to 'dictate' to Heads of Centres over the role of their Exams Officer – but this new requirement has given all Exams Officers the 'mandate' to request the support they require to undertake examination administration and management in their centre.

Exams Officers must utilise this JCQ requirement of receiving appropriate training and support by carefully considering what they require to undertake their role.

Regarding training, this may focus upon two areas – knowledge and skills.

Knowledge

To increase their knowledge and understanding of the role, Exams Officers may decide to engage in training, such as:

- [National Conferences](#) – attended by all of the JCQ awarding bodies

- Tailored training events – for new Exams Officers (helping you become an effective and efficient Exams Officer) and experienced Exams Officers (focusing upon exam regulation changes each academic year)
- Specialist training events – to showcase how specific requirements can be met, such as training your invigilators
- Awarding body training – these detail requirements and processes for specific qualifications from each awarding body
- Network meetings – to acquire support and hints and tips from fellow Exams Officers
- Online support – access to organisations which provide online tools which save Exams Officers/centres time, and engagement in webinars/online training

Skills

Exams Officers may also want to acquire training, support and guidance in developing skills which support them in the everyday role. Exams Officers require a range of skills to undertake their role, including:

- Being well organised (completing processes, meeting deadlines and requesting information from colleagues in a timely manner)
- Time management (ensuring that tasks as required by the ‘Exams Cycle’ are completed and to deadline)
- People management (including invigilators, and instructing reception and site staff)
- Persuasion skills (asking staff, such as members of your invigilation team, to undertake specific activities)
- Negotiation skills (when requesting information from teaching staff, commandeering rooms for examinations, or working with site staff to set up large examination rooms when examinations clash with activities such as parents’ evenings)
- Presentation skills (when training invigilators, or instructing candidates and/or members of teaching staff)

As for **support**, Exams Officers should ensure that they have a dedicated line manager – preferably someone who is part of the Senior Leadership Team – who supports them in a range of activities, including the following 10 areas:

- Ensuring that all relevant members of staff/centre are aware of the JCQ regulations – for example, SENCo, Head of Centre, SLT, Heads of Departments
- Access to Continued Professional Development (CPD) – this may include released to attend training events or acquire the skills as detailed above
- Gathering information from teaching staff in a timely manner to meet internal/external deadlines

- Devising exams-related policies – this may also include approval/‘signing off’ of such policies
- Confirming the role of the SENCo and Exams Officer in the access arrangements process
- Addressing the issue of late examination entry fees with relevant departments (if applicable)
- Acquiring adequate rooming for examinations
- Informing staff, candidates and parents of examination-related information – this will include staff roles/responsibilities, examination room regulations for candidates, and results/post-results information and arrangements
- Dealing with issues such as late/very late candidate arrival, poor behaviour, identifying candidates and candidate and staff malpractice and in line with JCQ regulations
- Devising and implementing contingency arrangements

The JCQ are doing what they can to help to ensure that centres have a well-trained, adequately supported Exams Officer in role. This ensures that robust examination procedures in place in centre, which in turn supports candidates in performing to their academic potential when sitting their examinations – that is why this change to the General Regulations is such a significant change beyond the Exams Officer community alone.