

The [General Regulations](#) (published by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)) clearly set out what is expected of the Head of centre/SLT with regard to the management of examinations within their centre. It is imperative that the *General Regulations* are read and referred to by Heads of centres, and members of SLT if responsibility is devolved, and examination officers as failure to comply with the regulations will very likely lead to the suspension of centre status. This means that a centre will be unable to submit examination entries, not receive or be able to access question papers, and ultimately, an awarding body could withdraw centre approval.

Head of centre responsibility – the National Centre Number Register and the Head of Centre Declaration

The Head of centre must agree to, and sign, the National Centre Number Head of Centre Declaration.

This is confirmed in Section 1.5, page 2 of *General Regulations* which state that ‘...all heads of centres will be required to confirm, on an annual basis, that they are both aware of and adhering to the latest version of the *General Regulations*. This confirmation is managed as part of the National Centre Number Register (NCNR) annual update.’

This responsibility **cannot** be delegated to a member of the senior leadership team or the exams officer.

Centres are also required to update, on an annual basis, the National Centre Number Register. This can be undertaken by the exams officer, but failure to respond to the NCNR annual update and/or the head of centre’s declaration, will result in the suspension of centre status which will prevent the submission of examination entries and not receiving or being able to access question papers. Ultimately awarding bodies could withdraw centre approval.

A signed copy of the head of centre’s declaration for the academic year 2019/20 must be held on file, available for inspection, as it will be an integral part of the centre inspection

Devolving responsibility

The *General Regulations* (section 2, page 3) clearly state that: ‘*The head of centre is the individual who is accountable to the awarding bodies for ensuring that the centre is compliant with the published JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements in order to ensure the security and integrity of the examinations/assessments at all times.*’

It is unrealistic to expect the Head of centre to manage all aspects of examinations within their centre, so it is acceptable to devolve responsibility to other staff. However, if this is the case, then the regulations (section 5.3, page 11) place responsibility upon the Head of centre ‘...to ensure that his/her centre enables the relevant senior leader(s), the examinations officer and the SENCo to receive appropriate training and support in order to facilitate the effective delivery of examinations and assessments within the centre, and ensure compliance with the published JCQ regulations.’

A key member of staff responsible for ensuring that examinations are managed, administered and

conducted in accordance with the JCQ's (and awarding body) regulations is the exams officer. However, it is unacceptable to appoint a member of staff to this key area without the training **and** support which is required to fulfil this pivotal role within centres.

The exams officer is the 'gatekeeper' of examinations within a centre. This is '*...the person appointed by the head of centre to act on behalf of, and be the main point of contact for, the centre in matters relating to the general administration of awarding body examinations and assessments (Section 2.4, page 3).*' The same section also confirms that '*the head of centre may not appoint themselves as the examinations officer. A head of centre and an examinations officer are two distinct and separate roles.*'

JCQ Independent Malpractice Commission

In September 2019, the JCQ [Independent Malpractice Commission](#) published its' findings after a year of investigation, and confirmed the responsibility upon Heads of centres and SLT in overseeing the examination process within their centre, and the key role played by exams officers in maintaining and safeguarding the integrity and security of the examination system.

The Commission recommended greater support for exams officers, the introduction of a 'qualification', and most significantly, recognition of a suggested [exams officer job description](#). The importance of the job description cannot be underestimated. Recognition has finally been given that the exams officer role involves undertaking tasks throughout the academic year. Consequently, centres should think carefully about additional responsibilities for exams officers at key times of the '[exam cycle](#)' and be clear that exams officers are not only engaged in the role during the conducting of examinations ('exam time'), but there are numerous key tasks for exams officers to undertake outside of an exam series.

Supporting your exams officer

Heads of centre must allow exams officers to access the training and support they require to fulfil the role successfully. Failure to do so could result in missed deadlines, incomplete tasks and candidates/staff engaging in malpractice – intentional or not. The consequences for centres in not effectively supporting their exams officer could be far reaching, including damaged reputations, financial penalties and significant disruption for students.

Not only will an exams officer need to be aware of changing exam regulations – particularly relating to the JCQ's [Instructions for conducting examinations](#) publication – there are also a range of areas in which exams officers will need support. These are highlighted in the 'exam cycle' as:

- Planning
- Entries
- Pre-exams
- Exam time
- Results and Post-Results

Within each of these areas there are a range of tasks which need to be undertaken. Although these are the responsibility of the exams officer, there are numerous tasks which cannot be completed by the exams officer alone. This is where a well-trained/informed member of SLT and SENCo play

their part in ensuring that a centre does not fall foul of expectations from the JCQ and awarding bodies. For example, a range of exams-related policies must be produced and reviewed on an annual basis, information must be gathered from subject staff to be submitted to awarding bodies (within a strict deadline), invigilators must be appointed and trained, and contingency planning must be in place in the event of the absence of the exams officer at key points during the 'exam cycle'/academic year.

The role of SLT/Line Managers

The Head of centre, or more likely the member of SLT appointed to manage/oversee examinations, must be aware of the exams officer role – what needs to be done and by when. This is required to ensure that the exams officer has the necessary information from other members of staff in order to meet deadlines. This awareness is also needed for contingency and succession planning - to act if the exams officer is absent at key points during the 'exam cycle'/academic year, or to support a newly appointed exams officer.

The 'churn' rate of exams officers stands at over 30% - this means that 1 in 3 exams officers has been in post for less than a year. It is unacceptable, but all too common, to find new exams officers leaving the role within 12 months due to a lack of information as to the range of tasks which need to be taken, and the absence of support from other members of staff. Too many exams officers are expected to acquire support from external stakeholders, and whilst this is perfectly acceptable, there is also a responsibility on centres to provide support from internal sources. This should include providing the relevant IT access and training, regular meetings between the exams officer and Line Manager, a requirement on staff to provide exams-related information as demanded by the exams officer to deadline, and to understand that safeguarding examinations within a centre is not solely the responsibility of the exams officer.

Conclusion

The responsibility for examinations within a centre lies with the Head of centre. If they choose to devolve this responsibility to SLT, then the significance of failing to adhere to the regulations must be clearly highlighted. Ultimately, it will be the exams officer who delivers the vast majority of key tasks, within deadline, within a centre. To ensure that they can undertake their role effectively, there must be adequate support in place – this comes in many forms, from training to IT access, effective line management to support in completing key tasks.

If centres fail to invest in the individual who oversees their exams systems and processes, then expect a range of penalties and issues from a financial, organisational or individual perspective. To avoid these, support your exams officer so they can effectively safeguard the examination process in your centre... it is well worth the investment.

Resources

The following resources and events (offered by *The Exams Office*) may be of use in supporting, updating and training staff involved in the examination process within centres.

Exams officers

- [Key Documents](#) - including checklists, guides and templates
- [Online tools](#) – *Invigilator training and assessment module, Key Dates Calendar Tool, Exams Timetable Tool, Exams Policy Generator* (to be available January 2020), *new exams officer induction module* (to be available January 2020)
- [New exams officer support](#) – including an induction and monthly support guides
- *2019/2020 Exams Officer Handbook* (dispatched to all member centres of *The Exams Office* in early October) – detailing key tasks with support materials, and a summary of JCQ changes in their *General Regulations for Approved Centres, Instructions for Conducting Examinations* and *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* publications
- *2019/2020 Exams Calendar* (dispatched to all member centres of *The Exams Office* in early October) – detailing key exam dates/deadlines from the JCQ and major awarding bodies
- [Training](#) (experienced exams officers) – six events across England detailing 2019/2020 regulation changes
- [Training](#) (new exams officers) – ten events across England in October and March detailing key aspects of the role
- [Winter conferences](#) - six free to attend events (for members of *The Exams Office*) across England with keynote speeches and workshops delivered by Ofqual, JCQ, the major awarding bodies and *The Exams Office* which prepare exams officers for the Summer 2020 exam series
- [Summer conferences](#) – free to attend events (for members of *The Exams Office*) in Leeds and London with keynote speeches and workshops delivered by Ofqual, JCQ, the major awarding bodies and *The Exams Office* which prepare exams officers for the 2020/2021 academic year

SLT with responsibility for exams

- [Online tools](#) – SLT training and assessment module (to be available January 2020)
- *2019/2020 Exams Officer Handbook* (dispatched to all member centres of *The Exams Office* in early October) – this informs SLT of key aspects of the exams officer role, serving as a valuable information, contingency and succession planning tool
- *2019/2020 Exams Calendar* (dispatched to all member centres of *The Exams Office* in early October) – the key dates and deadlines contained within the calendar should support conversations during meetings between the SLT (Line Manager) and the exams officer
- [Training](#) – events in Leeds and London during October/November/March which highlight the key responsibilities upon SLT in managing examinations within their centre during the academic year and in the build up to, and during, the 2020 exam series

September 2019