

Although the head of centre is the individual who is accountable to the awarding bodies for ensuring that their centre is compliant with JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements, in reality, the responsibility for ensuring this level of compliance is very often delegated to a member of the senior leadership team.

The individual given this responsibility may also be asked to line manage the exams officer, and must therefore ensure that not only are they fully familiar with a range of JCQ documentation but also that they are aware of the key exam tasks and deadlines so that they can support their exams officer if and when required.

Any senior leader or line manager responsible for the management, administration and conducting of examinations in their centre must focus upon the following five areas in order to undertake the role successfully:

1. Define roles and responsibilities

Not only must the senior leader define roles and responsibilities amongst staff in areas such as access arrangements, they should also be clear of what is expected of them. For example, will the senior leader be involved in disseminating exams-related information to candidates, parents and staff? Will the senior leader devise and/or approve exams-related policies? What is the role of a senior leader when a query is received from a parent? What role, if any, will the senior leader responsible for examinations play when a candidate is suspected of engaging in malpractice?

2. JCQ regulations

As well as being familiar with the contents of a range of JCQ documentation, in particular the *General Regulations for Approved Centres* and *Instructions for conducting examinations*, any senior leader given responsibility for examinations will also need to ensure that they are aware of any regulation changes for the current academic year, as well as having an adequate knowledge and understanding of areas such as special consideration, separate invigilation, results/post-results etc. in order to devise or contribute to centre policy.

3. Key dates and deadlines

Although the exams officer is responsible for completing key tasks and meeting awarding body/JCQ deadlines, senior leaders may also be required to lend their support to ensure that all subject staff submit the required information to internal deadlines enabling the exams officer to meet these external deadlines. The exams officer's line manager will also need to have a understanding of the key tasks involved in the management and administration of examinations/assessments to enable them to conduct regular meetings with their exams officer from an informed position, ideally with a checklist of key tasks which can be confirmed as completed.

As detailed below, contingency measures, such as the absence of the exams officer at critical times of the 'exam cycle', may require a senior leader to fulfil, or oversee, the exams officer

role. In such circumstances, it is imperative that the senior leader is aware of what needs to be done and by when.

4. Support their exams officer

With a ‘churn’ rate of over 30%, many exams officers across the country are new to the role. When this inexperience is considered with the statistic that over half of exams officers undertake an additional role within their centre, and that the vast majority of exams officers work in a ‘one-person’ team/department, then there is a clear responsibility upon the senior leader/line manager to provide adequate support.

This support may include holding regular meetings with the exams officer, being aware of busy periods during the academic year, liaising with candidates, parents and staff, resolving issues such as acquiring adequate and appropriate rooming during an exams series, and ensuring that the exams officer receives ‘...appropriate training and support in order to facilitate the effective delivery of examinations and assessments within (your) centre.’ (*General Regulations for Approved Centres*, section 5.3c)

5. Contingency

JCQ’s *General Regulations for Approved Centres* (section 5.3e) state that centres must have in place a ‘...written examination contingency plan which covers all aspects of examination administration’.

The purpose of this plan is to ensure that the senior leadership team will be able to act immediately in the event of an emergency or staff absence, and that there are procedures in place in the event of the centre being unavailable for examinations, or on results day, owing to an unforeseen emergency.

It is a significant responsibility upon the member of senior leadership team when they are appointed as the line manager of the exams officer, and in charge of the management, administration and conducting of examinations/assessment within their centre. They must acquire an adequate knowledge and understanding of JCQ regulations and awarding body processes, in order to provide advice and guidance for their exams officer. Senior leaders must also be prepared to make (final) decisions which may feed into centre policy whilst ensuring that their centre meets all of the requirements of the various JCQ inspections, failing which, any issues are addressed as a matter of urgency.

The role of heads of centres and senior leaders in relation to examinations is coming under greater scrutiny. It is no longer acceptable to leave all aspects of exams management and administration to the exams officer to oversee and implement. If a senior leader is given responsibility for examinations in their centre, then they must acquire the necessary training and support to ensure that they understand their role in relation to examinations – whether that is making decisions, confirming the completion of key tasks to deadlines, or even, in the event of an emergency, stepping into the exams officer role at short notice.

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