

## May 2020 blog

This month's blog is written by Jugjit Chima, Head of Training at *The Exams Office*, who gives hints and tips on how Heads of centres and senior leaders can prepare for managing exams in their centre during the 2020/2021 academic year.

### **Heads of centre and senior leaders should begin to consider how they will manage exams effectively in their centre in 2020/2021...**

The challenges facing schools and colleges this summer further emphasises the need for heads of centres and senior leaders to provide effective management of exams within their centre, and support for their exams officer.

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) regulations require heads of centres/senior leaders to:

- oversee the management, administration and conducting of examinations and assessments
- ensure compliance with the published JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements in order to deliver the qualification(s) and that examinations and assessments are conducted in accordance with these regulations
- ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to maintain the integrity of the examinations/assessments, including the security of all assessment material
- support their exams officer in effectively and efficiently administering external examinations in accordance with the JCQ regulations and/or awarding body rules for exam administration

The JCQ's [Independent Commission on Examination Malpractice](#) also recommended that an ethical approach is taken by heads of centres and senior leaders as they work proactively to avoid malpractice among students and staff. They are also required to take all reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any malpractice/maladministration before, during the course, and after examinations have taken place in their centre.

Expectations of heads of centres/senior leaders seem to be clear, but what is less apparent is how they ensure compliance with these requirements? Below are five steps which should be taken to ensure the effective management of exams in every centre.

### **Read the regulations**

It is imperative that senior leaders have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the regulations. They must be aware of the contents, and annual changes, in a range of JCQ publications, including:

- General Regulations for Approved Centres
- Instructions for conducting examinations
- Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments
- Instructions for conducting non-examination assessments
- Suspected Malpractice – Policies and Procedures

If a centre has to deviate from, or is having difficulty in complying with, any of the JCQ regulations, this decision must be made by the senior leader, in consultation with their exams officer/SENCo, and if further guidance or approval to deviate is required, then the senior leader should seek this from the JCQ or relevant awarding body.

### **Be aware of your responsibilities**

Heads of centres/senior leaders are responsible for ensuring that a range of measures are in place in their centre. These include co-operating with the JCQ *Centre Inspection Service*, responding to the *National Centre Number Register* annual update (which also incorporates the *Head of Centre Declaration*), and confirming that the *Conflicts of Interest* process is managed appropriately.

It is also the responsibility of senior leaders to ensure that there are processes in place for the receipt, checking and storing of question papers, and that secure storage meets strict JCQ requirements. Not only should exam registrations, entries and certification claims be submitted to deadline, but senior leaders must ensure that a range of exams-related policies and procedures are updated and in place.

Senior leaders should be involved in ensuring that candidates and staff are briefed on centre-specific requirements in relation to examinations and JCQ regulations (see below). They must also take all reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any malpractice, inform the awarding body immediately of any alleged, suspected or actual incidents of malpractice or maladministration, involving a candidate or a member of staff and investigate any instances of alleged or suspected malpractice in line with JCQ guidance.

There are additional responsibilities in relation to results/post-results and the issuing and retention of certificates, but in short, the ‘buck’ stops with the head of centre, and any senior leader given responsibility for the management of examinations and assessments must be confident that the necessary processes and procedures are in place in their centre.

### **Define roles and responsibilities**

In reality, the head of centre/senior leaders will not undertake many of the tasks which deliver a successful exam series. Generally, their role is to oversee the management, administration and conducting of examinations and assessments, and therefore, it is imperative that they delegate tasks to individuals who are clear on what is required of them and are fully prepared to deliver these tasks successfully.

For example, in relation to access arrangements, the exams officer and SENCo must be clear of their roles. The SENCo will be expected to determine appropriate arrangements for candidates with learning difficulties and disabilities and collate the appropriate evidence, but is the exams officer supporting the submission of approval applications via the *Access Arrangements online* system?

Confirmation will also be required over who will train invigilators and facilitators of access arrangements, and whether the exams officer or SENCo is responsible for the rooming, seating and timetabling of these candidates.

The exams officer may be responsible for managing and administering emergency access arrangements, but all other areas relating to access arrangements will need clear guidelines over which member of staff is leading and who will provide any administrative support.

If senior leaders want to be confident that their exams officer and SENCo are facilitating the effective delivery of examinations and assessments within the centre, and ensuring compliance with the published JCQ regulations, then they should ensure that these members of staff receive the appropriate training and support.

### **Meet regularly with your exams officer**

During an exam series, senior leaders should ensure that a meeting is held with their exams officer on a regular basis – *The Exams Office* suggests a weekly meeting – to discuss any issues which have arisen, or potential issues.

However, it is also imperative to meet with your exams officer at non-exam time throughout the academic year. At these meetings, senior leaders should confirm that deadlines will be met, discuss any problems and how these will be solved (and avoided in the future). These meetings should also address the exams officer's professional development needs, and any additional support they require to effectively manage the day to day running of exams processes or situations in their centre.

### **Liaise with candidates and staff**

One of the areas in which senior leaders can support their exams officer is helping to inform candidates and staff of:

- JCQ and awarding body regulations and procedures
- Centre policies/procedures
- Their responsibilities

JCQ regulations state that it is the responsibility of the head of centre/senior leaders to ensure that candidates and staff are fully informed of specific, key exam information (for example, entry information, timetables, regulations and notices).

In particular, senior leaders can play an active role in ensuring that information relating to centre policies/procedures, and the JCQ *Information for candidates* (coursework, non-examination assessments, on-screen tests, social media and written examinations) is distributed to all candidates via:

- Student assemblies
- Staff briefings
- Teaching time
- Centre website
- Parents' evenings
- Newsletters
- Information guides for candidates/parents and teachers (hard copy or online)

The JCQ's *General Regulations for Approved Centres* state that the head of centre must appoint an exams officer 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. This confirms that it is the responsibility of the exams officer to undertake and manage the vast majority of tasks relating to the administration and conducting of exams and assessments. However, in order to deliver these successfully, they will require effective support and management. Senior leaders have a responsibility to provide this whether this means leading on the delivery of a task, undertaking certain tasks, providing support, reassurance and guidance, meeting on a regular basis, but most importantly being aware of the regulations and ensuring that they are applied in their centre.