

Conducting examinations in line with health and safety recommendations

Unless there is a resolution to the current health situation in the very near future, schools and colleges will have to adapt to new ways of working in order to fulfil [government guidance on social distancing](#). This is already impacting on teaching and learning within centres, and, as we approach results days and the start of the new academic year, consideration is needed around how regulations will be implemented in the staging of examinations and assessments during the 2020/2021 academic year.

In this article, we consider how examinations could be managed in line with government guidance relating to social distancing whilst also addressing JCQ requirements.

Written timetabled examinations

The main area for consideration will be the staging of written timetabled examinations. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) regulations have always required centres to adhere to social distancing in the exam room at a minimum distance of 1.25 metres in all directions from centre to centre of the candidates' chairs. The rules also require, wherever possible, for candidates to be facing in the same direction. In the current health situation, this remains a very good principle to meet the requirements of risk mitigation.

Before and at the end of the examination

Centres will need to consider potential challenges prior to and at the end of the examination. For example, how will candidates social distance whilst they wait to enter the examination room? How will candidates enter and be dismissed from the examination room whilst ensuring that an adequate distance is maintained?

Although candidates could be lined up in candidate order and at least one metre apart for some examinations whilst waiting to enter the examination room, this may be a challenge where larger cohorts are involved. Although an additional advantage of a formal entry into, and exit from, the examination room is the avoidance of malpractice and the maintaining of discipline, centres will need to consider the time taken to organise candidates to queue at least one metre apart outside of the examination room, and enter and leave the examination room in a structured manner.

The examination room

If current guidelines of maintaining one metre distancing with risk mitigation (where two metres is not possible) remain acceptable, then centres could consider the following to ensure that the examination room complies with government requirements:

- Improving ventilation in the exam room
- Using a greater number of rooms to reduce the number of candidates in each room

- Changing room layouts to provide distancing greater than 1.25 metres between the centre to centre of candidates' chairs. This may include a row of empty desks between candidates to increase the distance to 2.5 metres between candidates. This may also help invigilators maintain their distance as they move around the examination and eliminate some forms of malpractice
- Increasing cleaning and handwashing by providing hand sanitisers in and around the exam room
- Wiping desks before and after the examination ([government guidance](#) suggests using products such as detergents and bleach)
- Not supplying additional equipment (e.g. pens, calculators etc.) to candidates to avoid cross-contamination
- Providing antibacterial wipes to invigilators to use in the exam room before, during and after an examination, if required
- Requiring invigilators to wear gloves at all times
- Using protective screens between candidate desks
- Face coverings/personal protective equipment (PPE) for invigilators, and possibly candidates, if appropriate and relevant to the centre

During the examination

During the examination, centres will need to consider how invigilators interact with candidates whilst maintaining social distancing. As part of the risk mitigation, invigilators should consider the following when interacting with candidates during the examination:

- Stand side-by-side or behind candidates, rather than facing them
- Keep interactions brief
- Wear a face covering/PPE
- Use hand sanitiser after every transaction
- Avoid touching the candidates' desks
- Dispose of any waste safely using gloves

However, these are not the only challenges which centres and invigilators must consider during an examination. If a candidate requires assistance, and an invigilator is maintaining the required assistance of at least one metre from a candidate, a candidate may have to raise their voice when liaising with an invigilator which could disturb other candidates sat nearby. The situation could be exacerbated if an invigilator is wearing PPE and has difficulty in hearing a candidate who is speaking quietly or in a whisper.

Access arrangements

Particular attention will be needed for the delivery of access arrangements where social distancing may present further challenges. For example, a reader may find it impossible to sit at least one metre apart from a candidate if they need to point to, and/or read from, the question paper. It may also be difficult for a scribe to maintain such a distance as they write, or type, a candidate's responses.

There are several options which centres could consider in overcoming these issues:

- Utilise assistive technology to eliminate the need for a human reader or scribe. This may include an examination reading pen, or the use of word processor
- If a human reader or scribe is to be used, ensure that they are wearing the appropriate PPE
- Where a reader is required, ensure that the facilitator has access, and refers, to a question paper which is solely their copy and that they do not touch the candidate's question paper
- Ensure that the candidate can access the necessary equipment to hand throughout the examination – including additional answer sheets - from the start of the examination. This will enable the candidate to access this without involving the facilitator, however, this will require invigilators to be particularly vigilant to ensure that the candidate does not remove materials, such as additional answer sheets, from the examination room
- Place the candidate and reader/scribe in a separate room in a one-to-one situation to ensure social distancing, a well ventilated room, and to allow the candidate to talk louder without disturbing other candidates if the reader/scribe is sat a distance away from them
- Ensure that the room is well ventilated and thoroughly cleaned before/after each examination

For access arrangements where one-to-one rooming is not possible or practical, such as a prompter or practical assistant, ensure that the facilitator adheres to the guidelines as set for invigilators in the other examination rooms (see above - *Written timetabled examinations*).

Results days

[The Exams Office June blog](#) provides some excellent hints and tips on managing summer results days.

Many aspects of issuing results will be similar to the centre process deployed in previous years. For example, students will need to be made aware of the process for the collection/receipt of results ahead of results day, centres must provide candidates with a statement which contains their results, and senior members of centre staff should be accessible to candidates immediately after the publication of results so that results may be discussed and decisions made on the options available to students.

However, social distancing measures will require centres to consider additional factors when disseminating results to students. This may include measures such as:

- Specifying times for students to collect their results
- Using multiple rooms for the issuing of results
- Creating 'one-way' systems in and around rooms from which results are issued
- Ensuring the availability of products which promote safe handling, such as hand sanitisers and disposable gloves etc.
- Disseminating results in an outdoor location. If this is the chosen method of collection, an alternative indoor location should be allocated as a contingency measure against adverse weather conditions

As with any exam series, centres should note the following JCQ regulations in relation to the

release of results:

- Candidates must not receive results, by e-mail, post or otherwise, prior to 0800 hours
- Results must not be posted until after 0800 hours on the appropriate date for the publication of results
- Results, or information derived from results, must not be divulged or discussed on social media such as Facebook or Twitter
- Centres must not release results data to local authorities until after 9.30am on the appropriate date for the publication of results
- Centres must not issue press releases or statements to the media under any circumstances until after 9.30am on the appropriate date for the publication of results
- Results data must not be shared more widely until after the candidates have received their results

Invigilation

As well as following JCQ guidelines as set out in the [Instructions for conducting examinations](#) in relation to the suitability of who can/cannot invigilate, exams officers will also need to be aware of the availability and suitability of their invigilators during the 2020/2021 academic year. Suitability around who should be invigilating will be determined by centres after consulting [government guidance](#), paying particular attention to those classified as clinically vulnerable – which includes those aged 70 and over, those with certain underlying conditions and pregnant women.

However, it may be that some invigilators declare themselves unavailable for some or all examinations taking place during the 2020/2021 academic year. Some current invigilators may choose not to invigilate amidst fears of contracting the virus in the examination room. Some invigilators may decide that they cannot commit to invigilating in October and/or November (the additional autumn examination series), or in June and July if a later summer exam series is confirmed.

If centres suspect that the above factors may result in a shortage of invigilators during the 2020/2021 academic year, then the exams officer and senior leaders should plan to mitigate the impact on their centre. A contingency plan should be devised which may include training relevant centre staff in JCQ regulations to support the invigilation of examinations during the 2020/2021 academic year, or seeking to recruit and train additional invigilators as early as possible. Centres should also consider that all invigilators should be trained in JCQ regulations – a training session must be held for any new invigilators to ensure that they are familiar with the contents of the JCQ's *Instructions for conducting examinations* booklet, and an update meeting must be held for the existing invigilation team so that they are aware of any changes.

In recent weeks, there has been a focus on the challenges facing schools and colleges in delivering teaching and learning to students during the 2020/2021 academic year. However, there are similar challenges regarding the delivery of examinations which have not been highlighted. Senior leadership teams are strongly advised to support their exams officer in ensuring that both government and JCQ regulations are addressed in the conducting of examinations over the next 12 months, whilst also considering the impact upon candidates and

centre staff, such as invigilators. Thorough, and early, planning will be required to ensure that the right conditions are created to ensure the safety of those involved in examinations, whilst creating the best possible conditions to enable candidates to perform to the best of their ability.

Note

This article was written with reference to the following guidance as available on the Gov.uk website on 20 July 2020:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-two-metre-social-distancing-guidance/review-of-two-metre-social-distancing-guidance>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing-after-4-july>