

Exams Officer survey 2020/2021

The Exams Office has undertaken an annual survey of exams officers since 2017 to help provide a greater insight into the issues faced by exams officers within their centres. For the 2020/21 survey 1,121 responses were received.

The areas addressed in the survey included:

- Time in role and salary
- Annual appraisal
- Additional roles
- Contract type
- Support for exams officers
- Centre type/qualifications taken
- Supporting candidates and invigilators/reducing malpractice
- Awarding organisations
- Access arrangements

Below are the responses to each question within the survey, with comments added, where appropriate.

Time in role and salary

Q1: For how long have you been working as an exams officer?

Less than 6 months	2.5%
6 months-1 year	6.7%
1-2 years	10.3%
2-3 years	10.0%
3-4 years	15.3%
5-10 years	24.8%
10+ years	30.4%

Q2: For how long have you been the exams officer at your current centre?

Less than 6 months	3.9%
6 months-1 year	8.6%
1-2 years	14.4%
2-3 years	12.8%
3-4 years	17.4%
5-10 years	23.4%
10+ years	19.5%

Q3: Please detail your salary band (full-time equivalent)

£14,999 or less	1.6%
£15,000-£19,999	10.6%
£20,000-£24,999	37.5%
£25,000-£29,999	30.1%
£30,000-£34,999	14.7%
£35,000+	5.5%

Comment:

Having a large number of inexperienced exams officers within the sector is of concern, as their lack of knowledge can introduce risk into the exam/assessment system.

In a survey conducted during November/December 2018 (survey sample = 1,421), 25% of exams officers were identified as 'new to the role of exams officer' (less than one year). This survey reveals that this number has been significantly reduced – to less than 10% of exams officers.

The reduction in the number of exams officers leaving their roles may be due to a reduction in the number of changes/processes to be implemented as no exams were conducted in summer 2020, centres appreciating the value of retaining experienced exams officers during times of uncertainty, or exams officers deciding to remain in their current position in the current volatile employment market.

A slight improvement in salary may also have helped to reduce the number of exams officers leaving the profession. In a survey conducted during November/December 2017, 29.7% of exams officers received remuneration of £19,999 or less – that number has fallen to 12.2% in 2020. Those receiving £20,000 to £29,999 has increased from 56.5% to 67.6% during the same period, and 20.2% are receiving over £30,000 in 2020 compared to 8.2% in late-2017.

Annual appraisal

Q4: Do you undertake an annual professional appraisal?

Yes	69.5%
No	30.5%

Comment:

The number of exams officers not having access to an annual professional appraisal has increased from 17.2% in late 2017, to over 30% in 2020. This clearly highlights the need for greater support for line managers in conducting an appraisal of their exams officer, and for associations representing senior leaders to stress the importance of undertaking this activity to their members.

The Exams Office is very concerned that almost 1 in 3 exams officers do not receive an annual appraisal. The conducting of an appraisal not only helps to raise the status and profile of the role but also provides valuable feedback for an exams officer to assist them in their career development. An

appraisal can also identify areas in need of improvement which may help to develop processes within a centre and help to reduce the likelihood of malpractice/maladministration.

As part of its requirement that ‘...the examinations officer...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’, the JCQ could suggest/recommend the conducting of an annual appraisal as an action for the head of centre/a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) responsible for exams to undertake as part of the support offered to an exams officer.

Additional roles

Q5: Do you undertake any other roles within your centre in addition to that of exams officer?

Yes	58.3%
No	41.7%

Note:

- 49 different roles were listed by those who answered ‘Yes’
- 45.5% of those who answered ‘Yes’ undertake a role involving Data/Assessment management/support (26.8% of all respondents)

Comment:

There has been a significant increase in the number of exams officers undertaking another role within their centres - from 51.8% in late-2017 (1,206 responses). Also, in the late-2017 survey, 54.5% of those who answered ‘Yes’ undertook a role involving Data/Assessment management/support (28.3% of all respondents). This number has decreased and reveals that exams officers are being considered for a wider range of roles in addition to their core employment.

The exams officer role requires tasks to be undertaken throughout the year, and therefore, if an additional role compromises the exams officer’s ability to prioritise the management and administration of examinations, then SLT must address the situation.

Contract type

Q6: What type of contract do you have for your current role?

Full time	25.8%
Term time only	37.5%
Other	36.7%

Note – From those who answered ‘Other’:

- 36.6% are employed on term time + 2 weeks contracts
- 19% are employed on term time + 3 weeks contracts

Comment:

Decisions around how grades are awarded in Summer 2021 should take into account that 3 in 4 exams officers are not employed on full time contracts.

Support

Q7: Do you have an exams assistant/administrative support?

Yes (non-FE)	6.7%
Yes (FE)	24.3%
No	69.0%

Comment:

The significance of responses to this question reveals a potential issue in centres where a wider range of qualifications, such as VTQs, are undertaken which require assessments to be conducted throughout the academic year. Consequently, it may be problematic for the responsibility of managing and administering examinations to lie with one individual.

If there is only one individual managing the examination process, there is considerable risk if this sole exams officer is absent on a given day, or for a length of time, not just on days when examinations are taking place. The situation is exacerbated if there is inadequate contingency in place.

Q8: Would you agree that you receive appropriate training and support in order to facilitate the effective delivery of examinations and assessments, and ensure compliance with the published JCQ regulations?

Strongly agree	46.9%
Agree	44.8%
Disagree	7.2%
Strongly disagree	1.1%

Comment:

There has been a significant improvement in support for exams officers in recent years. This is due to several factors, including:

- JCQ clearly highlighting training and support for exams officer within its regulations
- Awarding bodies investing in support for exams officers, particularly in understanding and delivering their processes
- The increased availability of online and face-to-face exams officer training beyond awarding body specific processes as offered by **The Exams Office**
- Centres understanding and providing financial resources to ensure that new exams officers receive training in the management, administration and conducting of examinations, and for experienced exams officers to be aware of annual regulation changes

Q9: Do you feel well supported by the senior leadership team in your centre?

Very well supported and valued	34.7%
Quite well supported and valued	43.5%
Not particularly well supported and valued	17.1%
Poorly supported and not valued	4.7%

Comment:

JCQ regulations state:

“It is the responsibility of the head of centre to ensure that his/her centre has in place a member of the senior leadership team who will provide support and guidance to the examinations officer and ensure that the integrity and security of examinations and assessments is maintained throughout an examination series.”

Therefore, it is disappointing and concerning that more than 1 in 5 exams officers do not feel well supported or valued by their SLT.

Q10: Is your line manager a member of the centre’s senior leadership team?

Yes	86.2%
No	13.3%
I don’t have a line manager	0.5%

Comment:

It is encouraging that almost 9 in 10 exams officers are line managed by a member of SLT. This raises the profile of exams and assessments within the centre, and allows issues/decisions associated with the management, administration and conducting of exams to be escalated immediately to the SLT for resolution.

Q11: Would you agree that your head of centre/SLT read/refer to/familiarise themselves with the entire contents of the relevant JCQ publications – General Regulations for Approved Centres, Instructions for conducting examinations, Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments?

Strongly agree	14.5%
Agree	55.4%
Disagree	23.4%
Strongly disagree	6.7%

Q12: Would you agree that the relevant member(s) of your senior leadership team receives appropriate training and support in order to facilitate the effective delivery of examinations and assessments, and ensure compliance with the published JCQ regulations?

Strongly agree	13.8%
Agree	40.6%
Disagree	39.0%
Strongly disagree	6.6%

Comment:

It is very disappointing and concerning that, in 1 in 3 centres, heads of centre and senior leaders are not reading, referring to, or familiarising themselves with the entire contents of the relevant JCQ publications. This is despite JCQ regulations insisting that heads of centre and members of senior leadership teams must familiarise themselves with the entire contents of the *General Regulations for Approved Centres* and *Instructions for conducting examinations* publications.

This raises the question in these centres of how heads of centre and senior leaders can confirm their adherence to JCQ regulations when completing the National Centre Number Register annual update.

By not being aware of the regulations, not only are heads of centre and senior leaders more likely to be unaware of what constitutes malpractice in their centre, but they may also override decisions or recommendations made by their exams officer who will be aware of and adhering to JCQ regulations.

It is also concerning that despite JCQ regulations stating that the relevant senior leader(s) should ‘...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’, this is not evident in over 45% of centres.

The Exams Office is planning a comprehensive online and face-to-face training programme to assist centres and senior leaders in acquiring the necessary support so they are able to facilitate the effective delivery of examinations and assessments, and ensure compliance with the published JCQ regulations, within their centre.

Q13: Would you agree that there is a member of the senior leadership team in your centre who provides support and guidance to the examinations officer and ensures that the integrity and security of examinations and assessments is maintained throughout an examination series?

Strongly agree	36.5%
Agree	42.8%
Disagree	17.6%
Strongly disagree	3.1%

Comment:

Following the responses to questions 9, 11 and 12, it is not surprising that over 20% of exams officers stated that there is inadequate support from the head of centre or senior leader during an

examination series to ensure that the integrity and security of examinations/assessments is maintained.

Q14: Would you agree that your head of centre ensures that your centre is always compliant with the published JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements in order to ensure the security and integrity of the examinations/assessments?

Strongly agree	43.6%
Agree	46.8%
Disagree	7.7%
Strongly disagree	1.9%

Comment:

The response to this question was more encouraging, and suggests that in the vast majority of centres, even those where the head of centre or senior leaders are not aware of JCQ regulations, the exams officer is ensuring that the security and integrity of examinations/assessment is maintained.

However, it may be of concern that almost 10% of centres are not ensuring compliance with JCQ regulations and may be engaging in malpractice and compromising the security and integrity of examinations/assessment.

Centre type/Qualifications taken

Q15: Within which type of centre do you work?

11-16	31.5%
11-18	55.8%
College/Further Education	4.2%
Pupil Referral Unit	4.8%
All Key Stages (1-5)	1.7%
13/14-18/19 (e.g. UTC, Studio school etc.)	1.7%
Other (Prison/Hospital etc. = 4 centres)	

Comment:

These statistics reveal the changing landscape of the type of centres which exist within the sector. An increasing number of centres are incorporating students in the 16-18 age range, and there is a growth in the number of 'all Key Stage' centres.

The impact upon exams officers in centres containing multiple Key Stages is significant. The range of qualifications/exams, and subsequent administrative burden, is increased with the greater number of Key Stages within a centre.

This also suggests that the workload for exams officers across different centres is not consistent.

Q16: What type of qualifications are delivered in your centre?

GCSE	99.9%
GCE	63.2%
BTEC	77.0%
Cambridge Nationals	60.0%
Functional Skills	36.3%
Other non-JCQ awarding body qualifications	32.9%
Other JCQ awarding body vocational and technical qualifications	30.1%
Cambridge Technicals	29.2%

Comments:

As 1 in 3 centres deliver non-JCQ awarding body qualifications, and 4 in 5 centres engage in JCQ awarding body VTQs, the range of qualifications which exams officers engage in can vary greatly from centre to centre.

The qualifications taken, along with the number of Key Stages within a centre, should be highlighted to exams officers when applying for the role, and reflected in their remuneration.

A further study should be undertaken which analyses which exams officers are engaged with more than one Key Stage, multiple (and non-JCQ) awarding bodies, and asked to undertake an additional role within their centre. There may be a workload issue for exams officers in this situation.

Supporting candidates and invigilators/reducing malpractice

Q17: Would you agree that at least one series of mock (trial, pre-public) examinations should be held under formal (JCQ-compliant) conditions to help candidates and invigilators familiarise themselves with examination conditions and to reduce malpractice?

Strongly agree	81.5%
Agree	16.4%
Disagree	1.6%
Strongly disagree	0.3%

Comment:

Despite this adding to their workload, more than 4 in 5 exams officers approve of at least one series of mock (trial, pre-public) examinations being held under formal (JCQ-compliant) conditions to help candidates and invigilators familiarise themselves with examination conditions and to reduce malpractice.

Awarding organisations

Q18: Which awarding organisations does your centre engage with?

AQA	99.3%
Pearson	99.0%
OCR	97.0%
WJEC/Eduqas	90.5%
NCFE	29.8%
Cambridge Assessment International Education	15.6%
City & Guilds	8.4%
RSL Awards Ltd (RSL)	5.7%
The London Institute of Banking & Finance (LIBF)	5.4%
ASDAN	4.4%
VTCT	2.3%
Other	1.7%

Comment:

Responses confirm that exams officers are dealing with a range of awarding bodies, and an increasing number of non-JCQ awarding bodies.

Naturally, this increases workload as exams officers must be aware of, and engage with, a number of awarding bodies and their processes. This is reduced by a large degree of common arrangements amongst JCQ awarding bodies, however, with over 5% of centres engaging with smaller organisations such as RSL and LIBF, exams officers in these centres have a considerably increased administrative burden.

Q19: How would you rate customer support from the following awarding bodies?

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
OCR	44.9%	45.1%	9.5%	0.5%
AQA	33.8%	54.4%	10.6%	1.2%
Pearson	25.7%	47.9%	21.4%	5.0%
WJEC/Eduqas	17.6%	46.8%	29.9%	5.7%
NCFE	18.9%	36.0%	31.5%	13.6%
City & Guilds	10.7%	25.6%	46.7%	17.0%

Comment:

It is very encouraging that the most prominent awarding bodies (AQA, OCR, Pearson & WJEC) all achieved a rating of over 50% for their customer support. OCR and AQA achieved very high customer satisfaction ratings, something which should be commended, and analysed to identify the actions which have delivered this success.

Access arrangements

Q20: Would you agree that access arrangements are applied with integrity and in accordance with the regulations in your centre so that the proposed access arrangement does not disadvantage or advantage the candidate?

Strongly agree	62.1%
Agree	33.4%
Disagree	3.7%
Strongly disagree	0.8%

Summary

The 2020/2021 exams officer survey confirms that despite some progress, in order to ensure the integrity and security of the examination process within centres, and to allow exams officers to perform their role successfully, significant and urgent improvement and action is also required in several key areas.

The number of exams officers in post for less than 12 months has reduced considerably, and those in role being given greater access to training opportunities. This suggests that the examination process within centres is being managed and administered by more experienced and well-trained exams officers.

It is also encouraging that remuneration across all exams officers has increased, but this should be considered in the context of an increasing number of centres which have students across several Key Stages, and a wider range of qualifications – including those from non-JCQ awarding bodies – being taken in centres. This adds to the administrative burden, and therefore, it should be expected that this will be reflected in higher salaries.

However, there are significant concerns which impact not only upon exams officers, but ultimately, the centre.

Firstly, there are still a significant number of heads of centre and senior leaders who are not aware of their role and responsibilities in relation to examinations and assessments within their centre. There are also too many heads and senior leaders who are unaware of the regulations and fail to support their exams officers.

The Exams Office is concerned of the impact of two cancelled summer exams series as this has led to an increasing number of exams officers being given additional roles, and calls for more formal representation for the exams officer community to monitor this situation and assess/promote the following:

- Raising the profile and status of the role
- Exploring the benefits of producing a set of professional standards for exams officers – these could address two areas which are of concern within centres, a lack of a formal appraisal for exams officers, and opportunities for professional development

- Developing job descriptions which provide more comprehensive information of the expected workload, including the number of candidates and the range of qualifications taken within a centre
- Conducting research into a changing educational sector and the impact upon the workload and administrative burden of exams officers across different centres. The analysis should also consider if it is feasible for all exams officers to be given additional roles and whether pay scales should be introduced to ensure fairness and consistency across the sector