

## **The importance of creating accurate, up-to-date, exams-related centre policies**

The requirement for schools and colleges to create centre specific exams-related policies/procedures has been in place for many years. In some cases, they have been viewed as an unnecessary burden and compiled as a 'box-ticking' exercise with the sole aim of passing a JCQ Centre Inspection. Policies should reflect centre activity and processes, yet in some cases, they have been created by simply cutting and pasting from the regulations or even from documentation created by other centres.

However, the need for each centre to complete a Centre Policy for determining teacher assessed grades in Summer 2021, and for this policy to be the responsibility of the head of centre, SLT and teaching staff, has emphasised the importance of creating a policy which clearly reflects individual circumstances and underpins centres processes. The exceptional circumstances surrounding this summer's grading and awarding should reiterate to centres the importance of exams-related policies and procedures and how they should reflect, support and mitigate against, factors which impact upon the management, administration and conducting of examinations and assessments.

### **Exams-related policies and procedures**

Exams officers are well versed with policies. On an annual basis, they ensure that the following exams-related policies/procedures are in place to meet JCQ requirements:

- Examination contingency plan and an escalation process
- Internal appeals
- Management of GCE and GCSE non-examination assessments
- Dealing with an emergency evacuation of the examination room
- Using word processors
- Complaints and appeals
- Verifying the identity of candidates
- Dealing with candidates' requests for access to scripts, reviews of results, reviews of moderation and appeals to the awarding bodies
- Process to check the qualifications of the centre's assessor(s) and that the correct procedures are followed
- Child protection/safeguarding, including Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) clearance (in relation to examinations)
- Data protection (in relation to examinations)
- Adhering to the Equalities Act (in relation to examinations)

In addition to these, an overarching Exams Policy may be required to include the following policies if specific issues exist within a centre:

- Candidate absence
- Candidate late arrival

**ARTICLE**

- Food and Drink in the examination room
- Leaving the examination room
- Managing behaviour in the examination room
- Overnight supervision arrangements
- Separate invigilation
- Access arrangements
- Special consideration
- Exams archiving
- Certificate issue and retention
- Lockdown (non-Covid)

As JCQ regulations are updated on an annual basis, any exams-related centre policies/procedures must be reviewed on an annual basis and updated where required, and as soon as possible following the start of a new academic year. Therefore, the reviewing and updating of these documents, as well as awareness of regulation changes across several JCQ publications is one of the key tasks which exams officers are required to undertake during the autumn term.

**Responsibility for policies and procedures**

Those listed above are not the sole responsibility of the exams officer. They should be devised by the relevant member(s) of staff – this may include the exams officer, but will also involve the head of centre, senior leaders and where relevant, the additional learning support/SEN lead – and signed off by SLT, head of centre, or the Governors. The exams officer very often acts as the ‘gatekeeper’ for these documents as it is they who will be required to present these to the JCQ inspector during their centre visit.

**The benefits of devising and maintaining accurate and up-to-date policies and procedures**

Devising policies is a time-consuming task which, quite frankly, many members of staff would rather avoid. However, there are several reasons why exams-related policies are pivotal for each centre, and why they must be reviewed and updated (where applicable) annually and include practice and processes within your centre.

Below are ten reasons why devising and reviewing/updating centre-specific exams-related policies/procedures should be viewed as a priority for every school/college:

1. Contingency planning

Within many schools and smaller colleges, there is usually only one member of staff who manages and administers examinations and assessments – the exams officer. If the exams officer is absent for a period of time or at key times (such as exam entry deadlines or during an exam series), and there is no other member of staff who is aware of exams-related processes, the centre could be exposed to malpractice or maladministration, or face financial penalties if deadlines are not met.

If accurate, centre-specific policies and procedures are in place which detail centre processes

**ARTICLE**

and timelines/deadlines, then these can be utilised as a contingency measure during the absence of your exams officer. Such documents will provide invaluable guidance to the individual who has to assume the role by acting as a framework for the tasks which need to be undertaken and any relevant deadlines which must be met.

2. Succession planning

As many exams officers are employed under contracts which require at least one-month notice when leaving the post, it is unlikely that any incoming exams officer (if appointed externally) will receive a handover from the departing exams officer.

In such instances, particularly if the new exams officer has not previously undertaken the role at another centre, centres may utilise policies/procedures to provide some guidance in how examinations and assessments are conducted within the centre. They will also provide details of centre-specific processes, key tasks and timelines/deadlines and may also serve in supporting the induction of a new exams officer.

3. Ensuring compliance

By detailing how examinations and assessments are managed, administered and conducted, centres are confirming that they adhere to JCQ and awarding body regulations. This is particularly the case if a policy/procedure is based upon a template provided by The Exams Office (see below).

All policies/procedures should confirm that JCQ requirements are being addressed/met and that the integrity and security of examinations is being maintained as a priority.

4. Meeting deadlines

The management and administration of examinations involves a significant emphasis on completing key tasks to strict deadlines. These tasks and deadlines should be included within policies/procedures with roles and responsibilities clearly highlighted. By doing so, centres will also ensure that penalty fees are not incurred for the late submission of information to awarding bodies.

5. Providing clarity and consistency

Policies which clearly reflect centre practice will highlight to staff what needs to be done, how it needs to be done, and when it needs to be done by. This clarity will ensure that tasks are completed in a consistent manner regardless of the member of staff undertaking the exams officer role or who has been given responsibility for the completion of a specific task even if they are not appointed as an exams officer.

6. Supporting staff involved in the management, administration and conducting of examinations

Clearly written, accurate policies/procedures will not only support staff responsible for examinations to understand what is expected of them, highlighting key tasks and how and when these should be completed, but will also ensure that they are completing tasks in line with regulations and help them to avoid malpractice and maladministration.

**ARTICLE**

7. Defining roles and responsibilities

The JCQ regulations clearly state the expectations of the head of centre and SLT in the management of examinations within their centre. However, it is unrealistic to expect the head of centre and SLT to manage all aspects of the process, and therefore, the [General Regulations](#) (section 2.4) also state that an exams officer ‘...is 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..’ and to ‘...support the management, administration and conducting examinations.’

To ensure clarity and that all tasks are completed to deadline, centre policies should always define roles and responsibilities to help staff members to be clear over what is expected of them and the areas for which they are required to assume responsibility.

8. Promoting confidence in centre processes and decision-making

Clearly written, up-to-date, policies and procedures which reflect centre processes and practice ensure confidence in a centre’s ability to provide the best possible conditions for their students when conducting examinations, whilst complying with JCQ regulations.

Such measures help to support candidates and teachers in knowing what to expect during an exam series and increase confidence amongst parents/carers that examinations and assessments are run efficiently and in line with regulations to help create a level playing field for their child.

9. Providing ‘protection’ for centres and staff in the event of challenge

In the event of a challenge from a candidate or parent/carer, well written policies which accurately reflect centre practices which have been adhered to by all relevant members of staff, will help to uphold decisions and provide ‘protection’ for centres and staff against challenges of malpractice.

10. Assisting in improving centre processes

The most effective policies/procedures are those which also include areas in need of improvement and actions/timelines/deadlines for when and how these improvements will be implemented.

The inclusion of such measures confirms that a centre is striving for continual improvement in their decision-making and operational procedures. By highlighting areas in need of development, centres are providing evidence of the priority they give to ensuring that examinations and assessments are run with integrity and in line with JCQ and awarding body requirements. This also proves the significance placed upon such factors as exam security and ensuring a level playing field for all candidates – all of which breeds further confidence in how examinations and assessments are run within the centre.

**Support for devising/reviewing/updating exams-related policies/procedures**

The Exams Office has invested significant resources in supporting centres in devising and reviewing/updating exams-related policies/procedures.

### ARTICLE

Within the [Online Portal](#), a [Policy Generator Tool](#) has been created which contains templates of many of the policies listed above. Through a process of self-assessment, centres can create exams-related policies/procedures in a fraction of the time normally taken, whilst accurately reflecting centre practice along with roles and responsibilities for specific staff members.

Once a policy or procedure has been created, it can be updated annually in a matter of minutes by either confirming that procedures and processes have not changed, or detailing any changes, including those as a result of regulation changes for the new academic year via a self-assessment.

All policies are retained within the Online Portal under the centre login, or they can be exported into the centre's local IT system, to ensure that up-to-date exams-related policies are completed and ready to use for the new academic year and available for inspection purposes when requested by the JCQ inspector.

Writing and maintaining policies may not be the easiest task to undertake, but during times of significant change, it is imperative that centres capture their processes and procedures to prove that they are adhering to regulations. This is necessary for a range of reasons – from good practice, to supporting exams staff, to ‘protecting’ against challenges of malpractice – and with online tools like the Policy Generator available to member centres, there is no excuse in ensuring that all necessary exams-related policies are in place....and reviewed/updated on an annual basis.