

Receiving, checking and storing confidential examination materials

One of the key tasks for exams officers in the coming weeks is to ensure that exam entries are submitted in advance of the deadline of 21 February. Following the confirmation of these entries, awarding organisations will begin to send confidential materials to centres in the lead up to the summer 2022 exam series.

In this article, we consider the regulations governing the receipt, checking and storage of confidential examination materials and what exams officers should be aware of to ensure that robust procedures are in place to manage the handling these materials.

What are 'confidential examination materials'?

There are a range of examination materials which are defined as confidential. These include:

- Question papers in any format, including modified papers
- Advance materials – e.g. pre-release material
- Assessment material downloaded from an awarding body secure site
- Exam stationery – e.g. candidate answer booklets, graph paper, formula booklets

Exams officers will receive these materials over a period once exam entries have been submitted to the awarding body/bodies and, therefore, the process for receiving, checking and storage of confidential examination materials must be confirmed in good time.

Roles and responsibilities

It is also important that any other members of staff involved in this process are aware of the regulations and their roles and responsibilities. This may include:

- Reception staff who may receive the confidential materials at the initial point of delivery
- Authorised staff who may transport the confidential materials to the secure storage area in the event of the absence/unavailability of the exams officer
- Senior staff/line manager who may need to oversee the process in the event of the absence/unavailability of the exams officer to ensure compliance with the regulations

JCQ regulations state that ultimate responsibility lies with the head of centre, who must ensure that arrangements are in place so that confidential exam materials are only handed over to authorised members of staff and that care must always be taken to ensure the security of materials (*Instructions for conducting examinations*, section 1.5).

Receipt of confidential materials

Packages (envelopes and boxes) containing confidential materials received from awarding bodies must be

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signed for and a log kept at the initial point of delivery to record receipt (*Instructions for conducting examinations*, section 1.4).

In many centres, the initial receipt of these materials will take place at reception and, therefore, this is where the point of delivery log must be kept. Staff with responsibility for accepting deliveries must be fully informed as to the process and their role, including the significance of maintaining the log accurately. This includes recording each awarding body's deliveries and the number of boxes (packages) received.

The Exams Office and JCQ both provide example logs ([Confidential materials logs](#) and [Materials Receipt Logs](#)) for centres to use as a way of demonstrating the receipt, secure movement and secure storage of question papers and confidential materials.

Checking the receipt of question paper packets

Upon receipt, question paper packets, still in their despatch packaging must be moved immediately to the secure room for checking and transfer to the centre's secure storage facility. When the question paper packets are removed from the despatch packaging, they must be checked carefully against the awarding body despatch note and the centre timetable or entries. If there are any problems, the relevant awarding body must be informed immediately. These may include instances where:

- it appears that the parcel or one of the packets has been opened during transit and therefore there may have been a breach of security
- there are any differences between the material received and the despatch/delivery note
- the material has been significantly damaged in transit or upon opening
- the material appears not to meet the centre's requirements
- the material has been received in error

The checking of these materials must take place as soon as possible on the day question papers are received.

Question papers must always be kept in their sealed packets and must not be opened in advance of the scheduled exam date and session.

Following the checking, question paper packets should be arranged in timetable order to reduce the possibility of opening a packet at the wrong time. The question papers must then be left in the locked secure storage facility.

See sections 1.6, 2.1 and 2.2 of JCQ's *Instructions for conducting examinations* publication for further information.

Exams officer unavailability

If the checking of question paper packets cannot take place as soon as possible on the day they are received, possibly due to a late delivery or the unavailability of authorised members of staff, the material still in its despatch packaging must be transferred immediately into the secure storage facility until it can be checked.

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The checking must take place no later than the next working day and must be undertaken in the secure room.

The storage of confidential examination materials

Question papers and any other confidential material issued by the awarding bodies must always be stored at the centre's registered address in a secure room with a secure storage facility.

The secure storage facility must only contain current and 'live' confidential material - past exam question papers, internal school/college tests and mock examinations must not be kept in the secure storage facility. Mock examinations and internal school/college tests may be stored in the secure room, but they must always be kept separately from 'live' awarding body material and be clearly identified.

Exam stationery (e.g., answer booklets and formula booklets) must be stored in the secure room, although if capacity allows, this material should be stored in the centre's secure storage facility.

Access to the secure room/secure storage facility

Only persons authorised by the head of centre and the exams officer must be allowed access to the secure room and secure storage facility. There must be between two and six keyholders only, each of whom must fully understand their responsibilities as a key holder to the secure storage facility. It is a requirement to detail the names and positions of these keyholders on the National Centre Number Register (NCNR) which is completed and submitted by 31 October each academic year.

The Exams Office also provides a *Secure room/secure storage facility keyholder and access log template* to support centres in detailing the keyholders and evidence that they understand the regulations and their responsibilities.

In the coming months we will provide guidance on the removal of question papers from secure storage at the scheduled time of an examination(s).

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (27 December 2021)