

## **The use of word processors in an examination across a large number of candidates/whole cohort**

In recent months, we have received several enquiries from exams officers relating to the use of word processors (the term used to refer to computers, laptops and tablets) during an examination. The questions have been increasingly related to senior leadership teams considering the use of word processors for a large number of candidates, or even across a whole cohort, during an exams series.

The use of word processors by all candidates is not unprecedented. JCQ regulations (Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments, section 5.8.4) refer to the centre providing word processors to all candidates where the curriculum is being delivered electronically. However, this is not commonplace in many centres, and although exams officers are well versed in accommodating individual, or small groups of candidates who require the use of a word processor as an access arrangement, it is understandable that some exams officers are concerned if large numbers of candidates are given access to a word processor and are therefore seeking advice over some of the potential logistical challenges if they are faced with this situation.

In this article, **Jugjit Chima** highlights some of the areas which centres should address when considering the use of word processors across a significant number of candidates, or even a whole cohort.

### **JCQ regulations**

A word processor can only be awarded to a candidate if it is in line with JCQ regulations. These include the use of a word processor only if it reflects the candidate's normal way of working within the centre. Therefore, a word processor cannot simply be granted because there is a preference on the part of the candidate, or centre, to type rather than write in an examination as work can be completed faster on a keyboard, or because a laptop is used at home.

Another regulatory requirement is for a policy to be in place relating to the use of word processors within the centre, accompanied by a statement produced by a member of the centre's senior leadership team which details the criteria the centre uses to award and allocate word processors for examinations. These documents must be available for inspection purposes.

Even when the criteria is met, centres must always consider whether the use of a word processor is appropriate for candidates in all examinations. For example, it may be more appropriate for examinations which require more simplistic answers to be handwritten within the answer booklet as this avoids the difficulty of visually tracking between the question paper and computer screen. Handwritten answers may also save the candidate time.

### **Logistics**

#### The word processor

Any word processor must be supplied by the centre and be of good working order. This includes a laptop or tablet which are designed to run for a long period of time once fully charged – as their purpose is to be 'free-

standing’.

### Battery life

The battery capacity of a laptop or a tablet must be checked before the candidate’s examination(s) and the centre must ensure that the battery is sufficiently charged for the entire duration of the examination. The use of a fully charged laptop or tablet will allow centres to seat a candidate within the main examination hall without the need for separate invigilation and access to power points.

### Disabling applications

Whichever type of word processor is used – computer, laptop or tablet – the centre must ensure that:

- the spelling and grammar check/predictive text is disabled and cannot be enabled by the candidate during the examination
- any previously stored data has been cleared
- there is no access to an intranet or any other means of communications or applications such as a calculator (where prohibited in the examination), spreadsheets etc.

This will require the allocation of word processors which have been checked by relevant staff, as example by a member of the centre’s IT support team, and for measures to be in place to ensure that candidates cannot override the system to enable access to any of the above.

It is also advisable to train invigilators to identify candidates who may be seeking to access prohibited applications during an examination.

### Seating arrangements

Regardless of which exam room is used – the main examination hall/room or a satellite room – the word processor must be accommodated in such a way that other candidates are not disturbed and cannot read the screen.

## **Information for candidates**

Candidates must be informed that they should use a minimum font size of 12pt and double spacing as this will make marking easier for examiners.

Candidates are required to add the centre number, candidate number and the unit/component code on each page as a header or footer and ensure that each page of the typed script is numbered, e.g., page 1 of 6.

However, if a candidate is using the software application Notepad or Wordpad these do not allow for the insertion of a header or footer, and therefore, once candidates have completed the examination and printed off their typed script, they must handwrite their details as a header or footer. Candidates must be supervised to ensure that they are solely performing this task and not re-reading their answers or amending their work in any way.

Candidates must be reminded to save their work at regular intervals. Alternatively, an IT technician can set up 'autosave' on each laptop/tablet. This will ensure that if there is a complication or technical issue, the candidate's work is not lost.

### Printing scripts

A candidate's word processor must either be connected to a printer so that a script can be printed off or have the facility to print from a portable storage medium. All printing must take place after the examination is over with the candidate present to verify that the work printed is their own. Centres must consider the time it will take to print and verify the work of all candidates at the end of the examination.

### **Invigilators**

Exams officers will need to ensure that their invigilators are aware of the regulations and requirements regarding the use of a word processor, and the tasks which must be undertaken during the examination. These include:

- Ensuring that the seating of word processor candidate(s) will not disturb other candidates
- Ensuring that candidates will not be able to read each other's screen(s)
- Providing candidates with specific instructions (e.g. opening and saving documents, font size, inserting specific information on each page as a header/footer, numbering pages etc.)
- Issuing instructions to word processor candidates regarding printing in the exam room or elsewhere
- Closely supervising candidates throughout the printing process
- Attach candidate(s) script to the awarding body answer booklet (where this is required by the awarding body/where the answer booklet contains any handwritten answers)
- Complete the word processor cover sheet (where/if required by the awarding body) and include with the script according to the individual awarding body's instructions

### **Conclusion**

The role of an exams officer is to support and fulfil the management, administration and conducting of examinations, and therefore, any issues raised in relation to the use of word processors are not done so in a negative manner or to block progression, but to ensure that the regulations are adhered to. The relevant authorities – the DfE, Ofqual, JCQ on behalf of its member awarding bodies – would expect nothing less of those tasked as the 'gatekeepers' of the integrity and security of examinations/assessments within a centre.

The exams officer community is at the forefront of supporting and encouraging innovation within the conducting of examinations, and any measures which support candidates in achieving their academic potential when sitting an examination, however, this must be undertaken within the prescribed regulations. Anything less would be a negligence of duty on the part of the exams officer and increase the possibility of centres engaging in malpractice.

*For more information, see JCQ's Instructions for conducting examinations (sections 14.20-14.25) and Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments (section 5.8) publications*

*The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (29 January 2022)*