

EXAMS BLOG

Key tasks in the build up to the summer exams series

In this article, Katherine McDiarmid, exams officer at Kendrick School, considers the key tasks which exams officers will need to undertake in the build up to the summer 2022 exams series.

It is natural for exams officers to feel a sense of relief (and more than a degree of satisfaction!) once summer exam entries have been correctly submitted, within the deadline, to the relevant awarding bodies. However, following this submission, exams officers move onto a series of key tasks which must be completed ahead of the summer exams series which will help to ensure that each exam day runs smoothly and in line with JCQ regulations.

Below is a list of some of these key tasks.

Entries

Even after submitting exam entries, an exams officer may be required to submit a new entry for a new or existing candidate (known as a late entry), make a change to an existing entry, e.g. amending tiers or options, (known as an entry amendment), or removing a candidate from one or more of their assessments (known as an entry withdrawal).

Confidential examination materials

Once awarding bodies have confirmation (by the receipt of entry information) that candidates within your centre will be sitting their examinations, they will dispatch materials based on your final entries. This may include:

- Question papers in any format
- CDs, DVDs used in an exam
- Advance materials (pre-release material)
- Examination stationery, e.g. answer booklets, formula booklets, graph paper

Exams officers must be aware of JCQ regulations as stated in *Instructions for conducting examinations* relating to the receipt (section 1), checking (section 2), and storage (section 3) of these confidential examination materials.

Exams officers must also be aware of the regulations concerning the removal of question papers from secure storage on the day of an examination (section 5).

Access Arrangements

All exams officers are strongly advised to meet with their SENCo, or an equivalent member of staff within a FE college, to confirm roles and responsibilities in relation to access arrangements/reasonable adjustments. If you are involved in the submission of approval applications, then you will need to be aware of 31 March deadline

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as the final date to process applications using *Access Arrangements Online*.

You and/or your SENCo will need to confirm that all facilitators of access arrangements are fully trained and that those candidates awarded an arrangement have been informed of how it will be administered on the day of the examination.

It is also worthwhile arranging a meeting with relevant members of the pastoral team to check that everything is in place. It may be that your SENCo only deals with students with special educational needs, whilst the pastoral team deal with a range of other students who may also require support during the examination series. This may be those with medical or other issues who need supervised rest breaks or those with conditions that may require separate invigilation within the centre.

Once you have identified the students who require access arrangements, you will be ready to look at seating, rooming and invigilator requirements (see below).

Timetabling

Exams officers will need to create a centre timetable and individual candidate timetables.

Centre timetable

This will need to include information such as:

- Dates of exams
- Qualification details
- Duration of exam
- Exam session (AM/PM)
- Total number of candidates entered

Candidate timetable

Candidates will need to be given details of their exams (you might want to use *Candidate Statements of Entry*) and information about the Summer 2022 contingency day, which is Wednesday 29 June.

Timetable variations

Exams officers will also need to be aware of the regulations governing the variation of the timetable. These can be found in sections 7 and 8 of JCQ's *Instructions for conducting examinations*.

Centres are permitted to vary the exam timetable and move exams between different sessions and/or change the start times in order to resolve a timetable clash or where the size of the cohort means it's not possible for all candidates to sit the exam at the same time.

In the event of a timetable clash, the exams officer must:

- Identify any timetable clashes

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- Be aware of the JCQ regulations (JCQ ICE sections 7 and 8)
- Resolve timetable clashes by discussing the varying options with candidates where applicable
- Brief candidates (and where relevant parents/carers)
- Brief invigilators
- Use the seating plan(s) accordingly
- Ensure that the security of question papers is maintained
- Ensure that candidate supervision arrangements are in place

Rooming

Exams officers will need to determine where exams and assessments will be held and confirm that any room in which an exam is held must provide candidates with appropriate conditions for taking the exam.

In the coming weeks, exams officers should undertake the following tasks in relation to rooming for the summer exams series:

- Complete a room 'audit' before you allocate rooms to check they are suitable
- Calculate the number of rooms required
- Select rooms which are appropriate for the type of assessment taking place
- Consider rooming for candidates with access arrangements or other requirements
- Consider where candidates will store personal belongings (e.g. bags)
- Book rooms well in advance
- Liaise with relevant staff (e.g. site staff, teaching staff who will need to find alternative rooms etc.)

Seating plans

It is a requirement to create a seating plan that shows the exact position of each candidate in the exam room for every exam room – exams officers may be able to use their centre Management Information System to create these seating plans. Please note that any changes made to seating arrangements during the exam must be noted on the seating plan.

Candidates should normally be seated in candidate number order, with candidates awarded access arrangements (and the access arrangement(s) awarded) clearly identified on the seating plan.

The seating plan must be available to an awarding body upon request. Signed records of the seating plan must be kept until the deadline for reviews of marking has passed or until any appeal, malpractice or other results enquiry has been completed, whichever is later.

Briefing candidates (and parents/carers)

It is a JCQ requirement for all candidates (and ideally their parents/carers) to be provided with/made aware of the following information prior to the summer exams series:

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- Relevant JCQ *Information for candidates documents* (on-screen tests, social media and written examinations). Information on coursework and non-examination assessments must have been provided prior to the taking of these assessments
- The content of the JCQ *Unauthorised items* and *Warning to candidates* posters
- The centre's written:
 - complaints and appeals procedure which covers general complaints regarding the centre's delivery or administration of a qualification
 - procedures for dealing with candidates' requests for post-results services
- Accessibility of senior members of staff immediately after the publication of results

They should also be made aware of the following:

- Relevant centre policies (e.g. Candidate Late Arrival Policy)
- Contingency plans for any disruption to exams
- Exam start times
- What to do if there is a timetable clash
- How seating information will be provided
- Logistical information relating to the dissemination of results on results day(s)
- Access arrangements candidates: Their approved access arrangement(s) and how it will be applied during an examination
- Private candidates: Information relating to their exam entries, the dates and times of their exams and assessments and arrangements for issuing results and dealing with post-results services

There is also a range of additional information which candidates will need to be aware of to ensure that they are prepared for their examinations. This includes:

- Candidate number
- Exam timetable and exam room information
- Identification requirements
- Instructions for personal belongings
- Mobile phone policy
- Exam equipment requirements
- The role of the invigilator and the importance of following their instructions
- Malpractice warnings and the sanctions which may be applied by awarding bodies for engaging in malpractice
- What to do in the event of an absence/illness on an exam day
- The designation of 29 June 2022 as the summer 2022 'contingency day' – candidates must be made aware of this contingency arrangement so that they may take it into account when making their plans for the summer (see *General Regulations for Approved Centres*, section 15.5)

It is for each centre to decide how this information is disseminated, but the most frequently used methods include:

- Briefing sessions (e.g. assemblies) led or supported by SLT/Head of Year
- During class/teaching time
- Hard copy – e.g. a Candidate Exams Handbook (see The Exams Office website for a template)
- Electronic – via the centre website

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- The Exams Office *Instructions for Candidates video*

Briefing members of staff

Senior leaders and teaching staff will need to be made aware of JCQ's *Notice to centres: The people present in the examination room* (provided separately on the JCQ website and in Appendix 8 of *Instructions for conducting examinations*) which confirms which members can be present in the examination room.

Staff will also need to be made aware of contingency plans for any disruption to examinations and their responsibilities on result(s) days.

Preparing your invigilators

Where you have recruited any new invigilators, it is a requirement that they are fully trained – this includes being familiar with the relevant content of JCQ's *Instructions for conducting examinations*, and any centre-specific instructions (e.g. where to evacuate to in the event of a fire alarm, exam start times, the method used to identify candidates etc.).

Your invigilators must also be aware of the following JCQ documentation:

- Checklist for invigilators (for written examinations)
- Unauthorised items poster
- Warning to candidates poster
- Information for candidates for written examinations
- Information for candidates for on-screen tests (if applicable)

Invigilator timetable

Exams officers will need to acquire the availability of their invigilators from which they will need to create an invigilator timetable detailing which invigilators are needed for particular exam days and sessions.

Exams officers should consider whether readers and scribes will be required for access arrangements candidates and those candidates who may require an emergency access arrangement, for example if they sustain an injury which prevents them from writing. Contingency measures should also be considered in the event of one of your invigilators being unable to attend as timetable due to a personal issue/emergency.

Conclusion

Arguably, this is one of the busiest periods of the academic year for an exams officer. The submission of exam entries has triggered a series of tasks which must be completed well in advance of the start of the summer exams series. Not all tasks are the sole responsibility of the exams officer (for example, managing the access arrangements process and candidates) and many can only be completed with the support of senior leaders and/or teaching staff (for example, briefing candidates and acquiring satellite rooms on exam days).

Naturally, there will be unexpected events during the exams series which will need to be dealt with, however,

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as many experienced exams officers will testify, the time and effort spent on planning and arranging the areas listed above in the coming weeks will help to guarantee a successful exams series and alleviate a significant amount of stress and anxiety on exam days in May/June.

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