

EXAMS BLOG

Preparing for the JCQ general inspection

This month's blog is written by Jugjit Chima, who considers how exams officers and other key staff within a centre can prepare for the JCQ general inspection which will take place during this summer's exams series.

The management, administration and conducting of examinations and assessments is possibly one of the most inspected areas within the education sector. The JCQ Centre Inspection Service (CIS) operates on behalf of the JCQ Awarding Bodies and is responsible for conducting inspections to support centres in delivering examinations.

These inspections safeguard the integrity of the examination system by ensuring JCQ regulations are adhered to and that examinations are administered fairly to all students.

Centres can expect any of the following JCQ inspections to take place throughout the academic year:

- General inspection
- Readiness inspection
- Question paper inspection
- Prospective new centre inspection (pre-registration visit)
- Access arrangements inspection
- Change of centre address/secure storage inspection
- Maladministration/malpractice inspection

In this article, we focus upon the JCQ general centre inspection, considering the areas that may be inspected and how to prepare ahead of the inspection(s).

The general inspection normally takes place when exams are running, reporting on the exam arrangements in place at the centre. The visit is normally unannounced, and centres may receive more than one general inspection visit in a single exam series.

It must be stressed that the general inspection is an inspection of the centre and its' processes, procedures and compliance with the regulations as set by JCQ and **not** the exams officer or exams office staff.

Areas covered

Centres must appreciate that the JCQ inspector may ask any questions, see any documents or speak to any staff members in order to satisfy themselves that a centre is adhering to the regulations as determined by the JCQ and the awarding bodies. If an inspector suspects any issues or weaknesses within the centre in relation to the regulations, they will delve as far and deep as they deem appropriate.

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The areas listed below are some of those which an inspector may focus upon during a general inspection.

1. The exam room

A key element of the general inspection is to ensure that all exam rooms comply with the regulations. The inspector will want to see that JCQ posters are displayed as required outside of the exam room, and that candidates are seated according to the requirements and these arrangements are recorded on the seating plan. Key information, such as the start and finish times of examinations, must be displayed and a clock must be visible to all candidates. Inspectors will also want reassurance that candidates do not have access to any unauthorised material. Finally, an inspector will want to see a copy of the JCQ [Instructions for conducting examinations](#) – in hard or electronic version – in the main exam room, and a process for identifying candidates.

2. Timetable variations

If a centre has any candidates with a timetable variation due to an examination clash, it is very likely that an inspector will question the arrangements that are in place where an exam starting time has been altered. Likewise, if there are any instances of overnight supervision arrangements, checks will be made that the appropriate forms have been completed.

3. Late arrivals and candidates leaving the exam room

As centres are not required to report candidates who arrive late for an examination, the inspection may include questions regarding the centre policy for the supervision of late arrivals. Centres should be clear that very late arriving candidates must be reported via the *Report on candidate admitted very late to the examination room* form within seven working days of the exam. This is done online via the JCQ Centre Admin Portal (CAP).

There may also be a requirement to detail the centre procedure for candidates who may leave the exam room early or temporarily.

4. Invigilation

Invigilation plays a significant part of any general inspection. Inspectors may want to see the record of the content of training given to invigilators, and if they witness the conducting of an examination, they will want to see that there is adequate invigilation (at least 1 invigilator per 30 candidates for timetabled written examinations, and 1 invigilator per 20 candidates for on-screen tests).

If an inspector is made aware of any exam rooms where there is sole invigilation, he/she will want reassurance that you are not utilising a relative, friend or peer of a candidate as the sole invigilator and that the person has a means of summoning assistance.

5. Question paper security

Understandably, question paper security is a key element of any general inspection. Centres will need to demonstrate the receipt and storage of exam/assessment materials, and the subsequent security of 'live' exam/assessment materials. The inspector will want to see that remaining question paper packets are intact, and that arrangements are in place for a second member of staff to check question paper packet(s) before opening.

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Once an examination has been completed, centres will need to ensure that they are complying with the appropriate arrangements for collection and despatch of examination scripts

6. Access arrangements

Although there is a separate access arrangements inspection, if a centre has any candidates who have been granted an access arrangement, the general inspection will very likely include a check on the confirmation of approval and evidence of need for any access arrangements. If this evidence is with the SENCo, then the inspector will ask to meet with the SENCo.

An inspector may ask to see evidence of appropriate rooming and invigilation of access arrangement candidates.

7. Exam policies and procedures

A general inspection will include a check of particular centre policies. This may include any of those as detailed in various JCQ publications (see **The Exams Office** [Policy Checklist](#) for further information).

The Exams Office has included 24 policies/procedures on the [Policy Generator Tool](#) and produced [Word templates](#) on the majority of the policies/procedures listed above.

Preparing for a JCQ general inspection

There are a number of actions which centres can take to ensure that they are as prepared as they can be for a general inspection. These include:

1. Be familiar with the JCQ *Instructions for conducting examinations* - ensure that examinations and assessments within your centre are conducted in line with JCQ regulations
2. Check the previous JCQ centre inspection report – were any areas highlighted for action or improvement? If so, ensure that these have been addressed
3. Brief relevant centre staff about their possible involvement – e.g. SENCo, SLT, line manager. Although the inspector will want to meet with the exams officer, and possibly spend more time with the exams officer, this is a general centre inspection and not an exams officer inspection. The inspector may ask to meet with the SENCo, senior leader responsible for examinations and assessments, or the head of centre. If any of these members of staff are not available, centres should consider contingency arrangements ahead of the start of the examination series
4. Ensure all required documentation is readily available and up-to-date, including centre policies and procedures. These – along with a record of the content of training given to invigilators - could be included within the [Centre Exams Manual](#)
5. Ensure that all exam rooms are prepared in accordance with the JCQ regulations – utilise **The Exams Office** [Exam room checklist](#)

Support for Exams Officers

The JCQ Centre Inspection Service is running a series of online support sessions for exams officers ahead of this summer's exams series.

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Delivered by current JCQ centre inspectors, these live events are providing an overview of the JCQ regulations for any exams officers running exams this summer. The sessions will cover the role of exams officers in the following:

- receiving and checking confidential exam material
- before the exam
- day of the exam (including invigilation)
- ensuring access arrangements are put in place on the day of the exam
- contingency planning
- avoiding malpractice and/or maladministration

Exams officers also have an opportunity to ask questions via the online chat. These supportive sessions are being delivered via Microsoft Teams. To book your place on any remaining sessions, please visit the [Events page of the JCQ website](#). A recording will be made available after the last scheduled event.

Views and opinions expressed in this blog are the authors own