

EXAMS BLOG

Last minute preparations ahead of the summer exams series

This month's blog is written by Alexis Wragg, exams officer at Rugby School, who considers some of the last minute preparations which exams officers will be making ahead of the summer exams series.

So, here we are, all the planning and hard work has been done and you are ready to get started on the first summer season since 2019. Based on the [Exams Officer Annual Survey](#) undertaken by the [National Association of Examinations Officers](#) in 2021 almost 1 in 5 exams officers have not experienced a summer exam series, although it has been suggested that this number is most probably much higher than this, possibly around 40-45%. This blog considers just some of the challenges you may face and suggests ideas to help support you on a day-to-day basis.

In this blog, I consider five areas where issues may occur and what you can do now to ensure that these are managed effectively.

Question paper packets

It is best practice to keep your exam papers in date order as you check them off on delivery. Using different coloured boxes for my main rooms, I organise my papers at least a day or two in advance. This allows me time to check that I have everything I need. If I am unable to locate a particular packet, it provides me with time to refer back to the delivery note, or the timetable, which I used when I first checked the papers in to my secure storage facility.

Whilst a missing packet of papers can initially cause concern, allowing time to locate it means you will probably find it underneath another pile of exams papers! But if you cannot locate a particular question paper packet(s), then contact the relevant exam board immediately and they will support you.

You will also need to consider your [Second pair of eyes check](#) which needs to be ready to be signed by yourself and an invigilator or a member of centre staff to ensure the correct papers have been removed from secure storage before opening and that any potential breaches of security are avoided.

Exam rooms

Providing an up-to-date daily exam and room plan for your invigilators can help them to identify where they need to go and they will not need to ask you at a time when you will be at your busiest.

Ensure your exam rooms are stocked with the resources needed for each exam. Simple things like having a whiteboard pen(s) for the invigilators to detail the relevant information at the beginning of the examination, or spare batteries for the clock, can save you having to run around unnecessarily prior to the start of an examination.

A tray of resources the invigilator can take with them to the examination room, or one which stays in the room permanently if it is used frequently as long as it doesn't contain any material that must be kept secure, is also worth considering. The Exams Office provides an [Exam box checklist template](#) as an example checklist to help ensure that you have a standard set of centre-provided exam materials available in every exam room.

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You may decide that your larger rooms need more resources, such as bottles of water, tissues for the inevitable hay fever sufferers, coat racks and boxes for unauthorised items to be placed in. Getting all of these ready ahead of time will help to make the whole process, and your exams days, run more efficiently. The more you can do now to alleviate any problems or risks with measures such as those detailed above, then the more time you will have to deal with any other unexpected issues/emergencies which may arise on the day of an examination.

Late arrivals

It is highly advisable to have a centre policy relating to candidates who arrive late for their examination, and to ensure that this is understood by candidates, parents/carers, invigilators and other key members of staff.

There should be a clear process which candidates must follow if they are late for their examination – from reporting their late arrival to the exams officer if they are aware of this (for example, they are caught up in unexpected traffic), to how they will enter the exam room after being given formal instructions in line with JCQ regulations.

If your centre policy allows candidates who arrive late to sit the examination, remind your chief/lead invigilator to allow them the full time. A candidate is considered very late if he or she arrives more than one hour after the published starting time for an examination which lasts one hour or more, so 10.00am or 2.30pm or after the published finishing time for an exam which lasts less than one hour. If a student is very late, send the script the normal way and then complete the VLA Report on the Centre Admin Portal (CAP). Refer to the guidance notes on the completion of the online [Very Late Arrival form](#) on the JCQ website to help you.

Candidates using word processors

If you have students who require the use of a word processor, you will need to consider a range of factors to ensure that their exam runs smoothly.

This includes considering the following which are part of the JCQ regulations:

- The spelling and grammar check/predictive text must be disabled and cannot be enabled by the candidate during the examination
- Tablets used must be able to run for the entire duration of the examination. If this is not possible then the candidates cannot be seated within the main examination hall and will require separate invigilation and access to power points
- Candidates must ensure that their centre number, candidate number and the unit/component code is added on each page as a header or footer and that each page of the typed script is numbered, e.g. page 1 of 6
- Candidates must save their work at regular intervals
- The word processor must be cleared of any stored data
- Other candidates must not be disturbed or be able to see other candidates' screens

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- Word processors must either be connected to a printer or have the facility to print from a portable storage medium. This must be done after the examination is over. Candidates must be present to verify that the work printed is their own
- Word processors must not give access to the intranet or any other means of communications or applications such as a calculator (where prohibited in the examination), spreadsheets etc.

You may also need to consider more practical arrangements including:

- Have you got a secure place where your printing of scripts will take place?
- Have you got a spare printer cartridge if it runs out half-way through the exam season?
- Are your invigilators trained to know what the students need to do in terms of using a minimum of font size 12 and double line spacing and that they include the correct information at the top/bottom of each page – centre number, candidate number, and the unit/component code and each page numbered e.g. page 1 of 2? Specific guidance on what to do may be useful, maybe a quick guide to word processing at your centre, it may only need to be one side of A4, but it could prove to be an invaluable resource if your invigilators are not used to word processing in examinations.

The Exams Office provides a [word processor checklist template](#) which is a useful point of reference.

Candidate instructions/avoiding malpractice

One of the most testing situations for any exams officer to deal with during an external examination series is a case of candidate malpractice. However, there are measures you can take now to minimise the risk of candidates engaging in malpractice.

Firstly, each candidate must be made aware of JCQ's [Information for candidates for written examinations](#) which can be found in both the *Instructions for conducting examinations* publication and on the JCQ [website](#). This can be complemented by showing your candidates The Exams Office's [Instructions for Candidates](#) video and supporting this with a hard or online copy of an exams handbook which details all of the necessary relating to the summer exams series from a candidate perspective. The Exams Office has provided a [Candidate Exam Handbook template](#) for this purpose which can be tailored to suit your centre's needs.

Candidates must also be made aware of the contents of the [Unauthorised items poster](#) and the [Warning to Candidates poster](#) prior to the examination – these posters should be placed outside the examination rooms in A3 format or projected onto a wall or screen for all candidates to see.

Many exam officers – with the help of their line manager/SLT - convey this information via an assembly prior to the exam season for Year 11 and Year 13 students. They also take this opportunity to highlight common mistakes made by students which may lead to malpractice, and convey other key information such as:

- What to do if you arrive late for an examination
- Exam start times
- What to do if there is a timetable clash
- How seating information will be provided
- How candidates will be made aware of their candidate number
- Exam timetable and exam room information
- Identification requirements

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- Instructions for personal belongings
- Mobile phone policy
- Exam equipment requirements
- The role of the invigilator
- Malpractice warnings
- What to do in the event of an absence/illness on an exam day
- Summer 2022 contingency day – and that candidates must be available up to and including 29 June 2022 or until their final examination has been completed

Providing this information prior to an exams series is vital so candidates are fully aware of what they cannot do, and what the consequences of their actions might be. There are also things you can do ahead of an exam series/day including checking the toilets as soon as an exam has begun to make sure no one has left any notes intentionally to use during a toilet break request.

However, sometimes there is little you can do to prevent malpractice and if a case of malpractice does occur in an exam room ensure that your invigilators record the necessary – and accurate – details/evidence so you can submit these to the relevant awarding exam board. You and/or a member of senior staff should explain the situation to the candidate, next steps and the possible sanction(s) which may be placed upon the candidate if malpractice is confirmed following an investigation.

Whenever an instance of malpractice does occur it is important to stay calm and follow the procedures as set out in the JCQ [Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures 2021/2022](#) publication. There are detailed notes on the [Malpractice M1 Form](#) in terms of what to do and a very useful checklist. The Exams Office has a training video on [Dealing with malpractice](#) in an exam room, so if you have not yet been able to train your invigilators, this – and its online training and assessment modules - should be utilised.

Conclusion

Planning for each and every exam day is a critical part of the exams officer role at this time of year – it will also stand you in good stead if issues do occur before, during or after an examination.

Although [exams officers should not routinely act as invigilators](#), it is recommended (if time allows) for you to walk around your exam rooms to check that everything is going to plan, and if not, to resolve any issues efficiently and as per the JCQ regulations. You may even imagine that you are the JCQ inspector and decide if you are happy with how examinations are being conducted (refer to The Exams Office blog – [Preparing for the JCQ inspection](#)). If there is anything that you are not satisfied with, then ensure that this is addressed. It is important that you take each exam day as it comes as each day is a new challenge and if something went wrong on a particular day, it can be addressed to ensure that it is not an issue moving forward. I can reassure those exams officers who have not experienced a summer exam series that you will get an enormous sense of pride at the end of each examination day safe in the knowledge that you have delivered a successful day...with renewed confidence that you can do the same again the following day and for the rest of the examination series.

Views and opinions expressed in this blog are the authors own