

OCTOBER 2022

PLANNING FOR THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR

'What do you do when there are no exams?'... this must be one of the most frustrating comments which any exams officer can hear, particularly when it comes from a head of centre, a member of their senior leadership team or teaching staff. However, such a comment also reveals naivety and a worrying lack of understanding of the exams officer role from those who should be better informed.

The exams officer role is an all-year round role, and the autumn term is when an exams officer undertakes the necessary planning for examinations and assessments taking place throughout the academic year...in addition to this, many exams officers will be involved in administering and delivering an exams series in November.

The academic year can be vaguely divided into two 'blocks' – September to February (and the exam entry deadline of 21 February) and March to September when the main focus is on planning for the summer exam series, managing and delivering the exam series, and preparing for and delivering exam results day(s) and dealing with post-results enquiries.

The period to February requires exams officers to be engaged in the following tasks:

Planning

Annual exams plan

This is a period where an annual exams plan should be finalised for the year. This is a concise document which lists all activities which are relevant to qualifications delivered in the centre. The plan should include all events taking place throughout the academic year which impact upon the exams officer role/time.

Such a plan will aid planning for the academic year and minimise the risk of deadlines being missed, and essential tasks not being undertaken. It will help to easily identify the busiest periods of the academic year in relation to exams. The plan should be shared with the senior leader with oversight for examination administration to highlight key aspects of the exams officer role, exam activity within your centre and the importance of keeping the exams officer informed of centre-wide decisions or events

Assessment and candidate information

This is also a time when exams related information is gathered and shared from/with relevant staff, and forward planning for upcoming exam series' gets underway. This requires exams officers to be aware of the range of assessments that may be taking place in addition to timetabled written exams which will be delivered within their centre.

Exams officers will also need to acquire candidate and specific qualification information from heads of department/subject or teaching staff.

Exams officers should use The Exams Office [Information gathering form](#) to capture the following information (or use information derived from this form to capture electronically) from each subject area:

- Awarding bodies
- Specification information, qualification entry codes and type of assessment
- Candidate information – the cohorts/year groups taking each qualification, including the total number of students
- When exams/assessments will be taken
- The member of staff responsible for each qualification

Key dates

Exams officer must be aware of key dates and deadlines issued by the awarding bodies and the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). Many of these are provided as a composite summary in the [Key Dates Calendar Tool](#) available from The Exams Office [Online Portal](#), intended to help in more easily identifying the key dates and deadlines that affect an individual centre, thus highlighting key tasks to be undertaken and supporting the production of an annual exams plan.

Contingency planning

The start of the academic year is a time when exams officers must consider any other issues which may disrupt exams planning within their centre. These include:

- Exams officer absence
- ALS lead/SENCo absence
- Teacher absence
- Non/late receipt of entry information
- Non/late receipt of access arrangements information
- Invigilator issues
- Failure of IT systems
- Centre is unavailable on results day(s)

The Exams Office has provided an *Exams Manual* to help centres in keeping a record of key documents which will support a centre in the event of the absence of their exams officer and help an exams officer beyond their first year in role.

Briefing candidates, parents/carers and centre staff

Centres are responsible for ensuring that candidates, parents/carers and staff are aware of a range of information at the start of the academic year, before an exam series, or ahead of results day(s). This includes:

- JCQ *Information for candidates* documents (coursework, non-examination assessments, on-screen tests, social media, privacy notice and written examinations)
- JCQ *Unauthorised items* poster
- JCQ *Warning to candidates* poster
- Written complaints and appeals procedure (covering general complaints regarding the centre's delivery or administration of a qualification)
- Written internal appeals procedure (relating to internal assessment decisions; post-results services and appeals; access arrangements and special consideration)
- Contingency plans for any disruption to examinations
- *Notice to Centres – The people present in the examination room*

- Written procedures for dealing with candidates' requests for post-results services
- Availability of senior members of centre staff immediately after the publication of results
- Post-results process, including the published deadlines for clerical re-checks, reviews of marking and reviews of moderation

Candidates will also need to be notified of exam entries, the dates and times of exams/assessments and details of when provisional statements of results will be distributed.

It will also need to be confirmed when and how this information is disseminated to candidates, parents/carers or staff.

Preparing for JCQ centre inspections

Exams officers will need to be aware of the different types of JCQ centre inspections which their centre may be engaged in, which include:

- General inspection – unannounced visits to check that centres are delivering exams in accordance with the regulations
- Readiness inspection – to support a new centre or new exams officer in their preparation for an upcoming exam series
- Question paper integrity inspection – to check that question papers are stored and managed in accordance with the regulations
- Access arrangements inspection – to review documentation and supporting evidence
- Change of centre address/secure storage inspection – where a centre has moved to a new address or re-located its secure storage facility

Managing confidential exam materials

Awarding bodies will dispatch materials based on a centre's entries, and exams officers must be prepared to manage these confidential materials in line with JCQ requirements, which may include:

- Question papers in any format
- CDs, DVDs used in an exam
- Advance materials (pre-release material)
- Exam stationery – e.g. blank candidate answer booklets

This will also require the exams officer being aware of the regulations concerning the storage of these materials within the secure room and secure storage facility.

Creating, reviewing and updating exam policies/procedures

The early part of the autumn term should be the time when the centre's exams-related policies/procedures are created/reviewed and updated (where applicable).

There are range of policies/procedures which are required by the JCQ (and which may be inspected), and those which may be required as good practice or to address specific issues within the centre (e.g. late arrivals, disruptive behaviour).

Policies/procedures should be completed by relevant staff – this may result in several members of staff contributing to the production/updating of one policy/procedure. It is not the responsibility of the exams officer to be the sole producer/reviewer of all policies/procedures.

See The Exams Office *Policy Checklist* for a list of exams-related policies/procedures.

Access arrangements - confirming roles and responsibilities

It is imperative that the exams officer meets with their special educational needs co-ordinator or equivalent member of staff within the centre to agree roles and responsibilities in relation to access arrangements.

If an exams officer is involved in processing applications for access arrangements, then they must have all the required documentation in place before applications are processed online and ensure that all deadlines met.

An exams officer must also be aware of candidates who require access arrangements and the type of arrangements they require and confirm their role in training invigilators and facilitators to supervise and support these candidates.

If exams are being delivered in November, then further tasks will need to be carried out prior to exams including arranging rooms and notifying candidates.

See our [October blog](#) for a further analysis of the exams officer role and responsibilities in relation to access arrangements.

Preparing to make entries

Estimated entries

Some awarding bodies may request estimated entries to be submitted. These are a best projection of the number of candidates that will be entered in a particular exam series and may be required for the dispatch of early exam materials.

Final entries

Although the deadline for summer exam entries is 21 February, those exams officers in centres where GCSE English Language and maths exams will be taking place in November will need to ensure that all entries are made by 4 October. Late fees will be charged if an entry deadline is not met.

Exams officers will need to be aware of specific subject and qualification information as well as candidate details before making exam entries. They will also need to be familiar with the Management Information System (MIS) used within their centre, or awarding body secure sites, to successfully submit, and check, exam entries.

Evaluating and recruiting invigilators

Although it may be advisable for new exams officers to retain their existing team of invigilators, all exams officers will be estimating how many invigilators will be required for each exam series/period over the coming academic year, particularly for the summer series.

Experienced exams officers will be assessing their current invigilator team and considering whether any replacements or additions are required. This may require advertising for, interviewing and training new invigilators.

Conclusion

The above is not an exhaustive list of the tasks which an exams officer must undertake in the coming months. It does not cover such areas as supporting private candidates (if they are accepted by the centre), processing entries for qualifications requiring early registration/qualification entry, preparing for the conduct of mock exam or other test periods and managing the November exam series. It also fails to address the additional burden which is placed upon those exams officers who are required to undertake an additional role within their centre.

What is clear is that individuals who make comments questioning what an exams officer does outside of an exam series should be forwarded a copy of this article to ensure that they are better informed of the role and responsibilities of the exams officer role.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (End of September 2022)