

MARCH 2023

Key tasks to undertake ahead of the summer exams series

In our latest blog, Alexis Wragg (exams officer at Rugby School) highlights the key tasks which exams officers will be undertaking ahead of the summer exams series.

Entries are in and now is the time to get to grips with the upcoming summer examination series, but before heading straight into exam day planning there is plenty to be done to ensure systems and procedures are in place to facilitate the smooth running of the summer series. So what else is on our 'to do' list in March?

International GCSEs

If your centre ran Pearson International GCSEs in January then 1 March is restricted release of results day and 2 March is student result day. Students can request reviews of marking and access to scripts up until 30 March and there is access to scripts on the Pearson script viewer until 25 May. Hopefully there won't be too many of them, but it is worth keeping in mind the deadline and reminding students of this.

Entries – Withdrawals and amendments

The key skill which every exams officer must possess at this time of year is time management. Whilst many exams officers will find themselves running mock exams, it is essential to keep an eye on the external exam deadlines. Maybe you need to withdraw a candidate by a specific date to ensure you receive the refund or making sure you don't incur any very late fees for late entrants. The Exams Office has produced a [Deadline for entries, fees and charges](#) template which summarises the deadlines, but it is always worth checking the awarding body websites as well. I know some exams officers work closely with the SENCo to ensure all access arrangement applications are in by 21 March. This is also the date to have any transferred candidate arrangements requested using the Centre Admin Portal (CAP).

Candidate information

Although many students want information to be sent electronically, I still like to send them an additional hard copy of their exam timetable...to display in their study, or perhaps to stick on the fridge door! I send them one copy prior to the February half term for checking, but sending a second copy along with their statements of entry and student guide to exam regulations negates the problem of them losing the first copy. This information pack can provide so much information for the students to read in their own time. Our booklet includes a wide variety of information on things from start times and venues to what to do if they are ill as well as JCQ information such as [Information for candidates](#) and their infographic - [On your exam day](#). I also have a page on coping with exam pressure which was taken from the Ofqual [coping with exam pressure – a guide for students](#) which was published in February 2022 and has useful tips on managing stress. I especially like the signs of

high anxiety to show students that it is normal to feel like that and what they can do to try to control those feelings.

While the post–results period may be several months away, our student guide includes our post results information as well as information on how we distribute certificates later in the year. Hopefully making it a complete guide to exams gives it more importance. If you don't have a student's guide The Exams Office [Candidate exam handbook template](#) is a fantastic place to start, providing all the guidance you need to make a comprehensive guide for students. Summer exam information is reinforced through our assemblies for years 11 and 13. I tweak my PowerPoint each year to include JCQ updates and talk to students about specific exam days which are more complex than usual. Clashes are always a concern for them and I find talking students through the process and describing exactly what happens during isolation relieves the stress a little.

If you accept private candidates they may need just as much support as a candidate in the main cohort, so don't forget to send them all the required information.

Training your invigilators

This year JCQ has set the training of invigilators to be more robust so I have turned yet again to The Exams Office [Online training modules](#) for my invigilators and allocated some meeting time for them to work through either the *Experienced Invigilator unit* or the *Invigilator Digital Accreditation*. We will do this in school with support from my colleague. I have lengthened the duration of my training from two to four hours and for the first time am providing them with a light lunch to keep motivation high. We will discuss the usual topics:

- Access arrangements and what we need to do to support those students with specific needs. The Exams Office have a PowerPoint template which covers all the areas you will need
- Malpractice and how we ensure it is avoided to the best of our ability
- Complex exams days and where I need people to be and why
- JCQ rules and regulations to make sure we are compliant, from posters in the right place to collecting in the scripts in candidate order
- International Baccalaureate (IB) exams are new to my centre this year so I need to train my invigilators on the differences and how we manage them successfully

The Exams Office videos will also make an appearance. I particularly like the [Invigilator Training – regulation changes 2022/2023](#) and [A candidate who arrives late for an examination](#). Providing a range of activities for invigilators during the meeting maintains engagement and makes for a more fulfilling and purposeful meeting. This year, I will split my team into smaller groups and whilst I run the IB training my colleague will run the online assessments, then we will swap the teams and deliver it again, before coming back together for the last session.

Confidential materials

On the topic of new JCQ rules, one thing I need for my inspector is a confidential materials log. ICE point 2.1 states that 'When question paper packets are removed from the despatch packaging they must be checked carefully and a log of the check kept'. JCQ provides an [Exam Materials Receipt Log](#) and The Exams Office also have a [template](#) either of which will work perfectly (but The Exams Office template is more detailed). Most Exams Officers will already have something in place for

this. I am sure, like me, you check every packet against the despatch note and sign it off, but it is always worth keeping it at the forefront of your thoughts and in plain sight for the inspector to see.

Special consideration

For me, March is also time to get ready for the special consideration requests which will come my way. A prepared folder, electronic or physical needs to be ready. The Exams Office has a [supporting evidence statement template](#) which is designed to provide a means of recording evidence to support the applications. All applications must be supported by signed evidence produced by a member of the senior leadership team. And don't forget, new to this year is 'The centre must inform a candidate when an application for special consideration is submitted to the awarding body. The centre must ensure it complies with the UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018.' (JQC A guide to special consideration process page 12)'.

Summer exams series

The biggest job this month, and next, is of course planning the summer series. It is time to drill down to each day, looking at numbers in each room, venues, invigilator requirements and which access arrangement rooms are required. In the past I have always kept A levels and GCSEs in separate rooms and I hope I can do that again this year. But as I work through the days I will keep in mind the possible need to combine some of the smaller exams to reduce invigilator requirements on the days when I have less availability. Once I have completed the entries I like to print off the timetables of the students with specific access arrangements and make sure I have catered for each of them in my overall plan, before starting to assign my invigilators to each room. This is the part of the job which I love, putting it all together like a giant jigsaw and doing the best I can for the students at my centre.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of writing (February 2023)