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NEW EXAMS OFFICERS: A GUIDE TO STARTING YOUR NEW ROLE

The exams officer role is a pivotal role in every school and college. Effective teaching and learning must be supported by well-run examinations if students are to be given the best possible opportunity to achieve their academic potential.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) fully appreciates the significance of the exams officer role and has regulations in place to ensure that an exams officer receives the appropriate support and guidance to undertake their role, whilst the awarding bodies have a range of measures in place to help exams officers complete key tasks and meet the relevant deadlines.

However, very often, at centre level there is a lack of support for exams officers, particularly those new to the profession who fail to receive an adequate induction to the role.

In this article we consider ten areas which new exams officers should focus upon/address upon their appointment.

1. Complete an induction

It is the responsibility of the head of centre/relevant senior leader(s) to ensure that you receive an induction upon starting the role. This will involve making you aware of specific centre practices, ensuring that obligatory training (such as health and safety, safeguarding, etc.) has been completed, that you are aware of key members of staff and who to approach in the event of a query in a particular area or for support.

Ideally, you should have a line manager (who should also be a senior leader within your centre) who ensures that you also have access to an induction which is specific to the exams officer role. However, if you are the sole individual within the 'exams department' at your centre, and the previous exams officer has left the centre by the time you are in post, you may find it difficult to source an appropriate induction programme. Therefore, **The Exams Office** provides an online [New Exams Officer Induction and Assessment Module](#) and recommends that sections 1, 2 and 8 are completed on your appointment to role. (Sections 3-7 should be completed during the academic year before each stage of the exam cycle. (Full completion and certification of this annually updated module must take place by the end of July each year as it is de-activated from then to allow review and update for the start of the new academic year)

The module provides information to help a new exams officer self-manage their induction to the exams process in their centre, signposting to information and support provided in the wider exams community, and to JCQ regulations and key tasks that are undertaken by an exams officer in the management and administration of exams in their centre.

By completing this module, a new exams officer will acquire information on key aspects of each stage of the exam cycle, and the key exams-related tasks and the deadlines to which they must be completed.

The module also contains a certificated assessment upon successful completion of all sections.

2. Be familiar with the work of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)

JCQ sets the common regulations for general qualifications and many vocational qualifications. Not only must an exams officer be aware of these rules, but they must also keep up to date with any changes which may occur in the various publications produced by JCQ as they are updated each academic year.

The main JCQ publications which exams officers should be aware of are:

- General Regulations for Approved Centres *
- Instructions for conducting examinations (ICE) *
- A guide to the special consideration process *
- Suspected Malpractice: Policies and Procedures
- Post-Results Services

The above – and additional JCQ publications - are available in PDF format from the *Exams Office* area of the [JCQ website](#). The publications indicated by an asterisk are available in an interactive format on CAP (the Centre Admin Portal). CAP is accessed via the awarding body secure sites – more [information on CAP](#) can be found on the JCQ website.

New exams officers are strongly advised to devote the necessary time to familiarise themselves with, and be aware of how to navigate, the JCQ website to help in locating key publications and information. It should be noted that JCQ regulations state:

The head of centre must ensure that the examinations officer has sufficient time to perform their role and familiarise him/herself with relevant awarding body and JCQ documentation

(General Regulations, section 5.3)

It is also recommended that exams officers [subscribe to the JCQ e-Newsletter](#).

Another function performed by JCQ is overseeing the inspection of centres via its Centre Inspection Service (CIS) which operates on behalf of the JCQ Awarding Bodies.

Although inspections focus upon centre practices/processes and compliance with the regulations, exams officers will be involved in supporting the JCQ inspector when he/she visits their centre. Therefore, it is imperative that a new exams officer is aware of the various exams-related inspections which may take place during an academic year and the role of the exams officer within each inspection.

The CIS may conduct inspections in the following areas during an academic year:

- General inspection – a normally unannounced visit which usually takes place during a common exam series (November and/or summer) and reports on the examination arrangements for general and vocational examinations and assessments, to make sure a centre's procedures for delivering examinations are in accordance with the published JCQ regulations.
- Access arrangements inspection - a focused inspection to look specifically at access arrangements documentation and normally where a pre-selected sample of candidate files is scrutinised. The security of any confidential exam/assessment materials that

may be in the centre and any other relevant documentation may also be inspected during this visit.

- Readiness inspection – a focussed inspection to ensure a centre is fully prepared for an upcoming exam series.
- Question paper integrity inspection – a focussed inspection to ensure question papers for a particular subject are stored appropriately in a centre and in accordance with the published regulations.

If relevant, the following inspections may also take place during an academic year:

- Pre-registration visit (for a prospective centre)
- Change of centre address/re-location of the secure storage facility
- Maladministration/malpractice investigation

3. Acquire knowledge and understanding of the role via online and face-to-face training

In the first year in role, the professional development needs of a new exams officer should focus upon increasing knowledge and understanding of the management, administration and conducting of examinations.

This will include a knowledge of processes, key dates and deadlines, and an understanding of how to complete key tasks effectively and efficiently.

One way of acquiring knowledge and understanding is to attend training hosted by reputable organisations with a history of delivering quality face-to-face and/or online training. This includes the [Actions for Autumn](#) and [Spring into Summer](#) training events offered by **The Exams Office**, and exams officer training offered by AQA, OCR and Pearson. Exams officers in centres in Wales also have access to support from Qualifications Wales.

New exams officers are strongly encouraged to make use of online training events in addition to attending [The Exams Office annual National Conference](#).

4. Network with other exams officers

The exams officer community thrives upon peer support and networking. Ensure that you join your [local network group organised/supported by OCR](#) as an introduction to other local exams officers as well as accessing key information and updates disseminated by OCR's Customer Support Team.

If your centre acquires a [membership to The Exams Office](#) you will also have complimentary access to a place at one of our [National Conferences](#) which includes presentations and workshops from key stakeholders including Ofqual, JCQ and the major awarding bodies, and is attended by over 2000 exams officers in five locations across England. You will also have access to a [Virtual Conference](#) which includes all of the presentations delivered at the National Conference.

A centre membership to **The Exams Office** also provides you with a free academic year membership to the [National Association of Examinations Officers](#) (NAEO).

There is online peer-to-peer support via social media, including the *Exams Officers UK* Facebook group.

5. Complete the invigilator training module

Although **The Exams Office** recommends that, unless there are exceptional circumstances, exams officers do not act as invigilators (as there are numerous tasks for an exams officer to perform on an exam day(s) which could not be undertaken if they are invigilating), it is very useful for a new exams officer to complete the [Invigilator Training and Assessment Module](#).

By completing this module, an exams officer will become aware of what is expected of their invigilators and understand their role...this may also enable you to deliver an invigilator training session upon completion of your induction year. Completion of this training will also enable an exams officer to also act as an 'emergency invigilator' in the event of an invigilator absence or if the need arises for an invigilator at short notice.

However, the most significant reason for undertaking invigilator training is that it will increase your knowledge and understanding of the JCQ regulations as set out in the [Instructions for conducting examinations](#) publication.

6. External support

Although it is the responsibility of your centre to support you in your role, you should also identify the support offered by the various awarding bodies. After all, you will be administering examinations and assessments on their behalf.

AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC/Eduqas provide support for exams officers via telephone, email, field teams and training events. Ensure that you are familiar with their websites and where to find relevant information, and to contact an awarding body via email or telephone if you are unsure or have a question. All awarding bodies do not want you to make mistakes or be unsure of processes and procedures, therefore, they encourage contact from new to role exams officers. If contacting via telephone, make the representative aware of your new to role status and they will be aware that you are likely to be unfamiliar with many of the processes, key tasks, deadlines, and acronyms associated with examinations and assessments.

Exams officers will also find invaluable information and support via the JCQ, Ofqual and Department for Education websites, as well as from organisations such as **The Exams Office**. Support from external organisations should be identified as part of your induction.

7. The Exams Office – New exams officer support

The Exams Office has a dedicated support area on its website with a wide range of resources specifically designed for new to role exams officers. These include an induction support guide, monthly support guides, a comprehensive glossary of key exams-related terms and signposting to key documents and resources.

Ensure that you become familiar with this section of **The Exams Office** website as it will provide invaluable support for you during your first year in post.

8. Be aware of, understand, and follow the exam cycle

It is imperative that new exams officers understand and implement the principles of the exam cycle when administering exams within their centre.

The exam cycle details the exams management and administration processes that take place before, during and after exams/assessments (relating to each exam series). There are five stages to the exam cycle:

- Planning
- Entries
- Pre-exams (Exam preparation)
- Exam Time
- Results and Post-Results

The exam cycle will guide you through the exam year detailing the tasks which need to be undertaken and completed, and any relevant deadlines.

9. Create an *Annual Exams Plan*

As planning is such a pivotal part of the exams officer role, the creation of an *Annual Exams Plan* will help to identify key tasks, dates, and deadlines. It will also minimise the risk of deadlines being missed, and essential tasks not being undertaken and provide easy identification of the busiest periods.

The Exams Office Wall Planner (which is dispatched to member centres in June along with the *Exams Diary* and *Exams Calendar*) has been designed to help exams officers create an *Annual Exams Plan*.

Your *Annual Exams Plan* should be shared with your line manager to highlight key aspects of your role, exam activity within your centre and why you need to be kept informed of centre-wide decisions or events which impact upon your role.

10. Keep a diary

Finally, it is good practice to keep a diary of your first year in post. Make a note of what went well and what did not, when tasks were undertaken and whether they should be taken at the same time (or earlier or later) next year, and what you may do differently in future years.

You should refer to this diary as a guide in your subsequent years to ensure that if any errors were made in your first year they are not repeated, and for you to develop and improve processes within your centre.

The Exams Office wishes you the very best of luck in your new role.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (August 2023)