

OCTOBER 2025**UNDERTAKING AN ADDITIONAL ROLE AS AN EXAMS OFFICER**

Data from the 2024 exams officer survey revealed that 51% of exams officers undertake an additional role within their centre, and although there is nothing to prevent centres from requesting this from their exams officer, there are a number of factors and issues which must be considered before this decision is taken.

The most common additional roles are involved in the management of data or administration roles such as cover supervision. There is also an increasing number of teaching staff who are required to perform the exams officer role within a specific time allocation.

The National Association of Examinations Officers (NAEO) is concerned that in centres where an exams officer performs a dual role, the head of centre and senior leaders may have failed to fully appreciate the scale and significance of the exams officer role and the time taken to complete all necessary tasks to deadline.

In this article we consider ten factors that a centre should consider before an exams officer is asked to perform an additional role.

1. Time

Firstly, the exams officer role is, at the very least, an all-year round role. If your centre engages in several exam series during an academic year, it could be strongly argued that the exams officer role is a full-time, all-year round role. Therefore, in these circumstances, senior leaders must consider how an exams officer would be able to perform an additional role effectively within the time available to them.

It should also be noted that JCQ regulations state (General Regulations for Approved Centres, section 5.3c) that 'The head of centre must ensure that the examinations officer understands relevant awarding body and JCQ documentation and has sufficient time to perform their role.'

If the exams officer is not given sufficient time to perform their role then the centre may be committing malpractice.

2. Scale of the role

Before requiring an exams officer to perform an additional role, the scale of their exams-related role must be considered. Senior leaders should be aware that their exams officers will, very likely, be dealing with a wide range of qualifications and candidates, whilst also meeting the needs of candidates with access arrangements, addressing rooming requirements and training invigilators and facilitators.

There can be little doubt that at several times during the academic year the exams officer role is extremely busy and may require the assistance of an additional member of staff to ensure that all tasks are completed on time.

3. The 'exam cycle'

Exams officers perform their role in line with the 'exam cycle' which refers to the process of managing and administering an exam series to ensure that all necessary tasks are completed.

Within the 'exam cycle', there are periods when an exams officer is required to complete tasks to strict deadlines which are very time consuming – to the extent that an exams officer may even accrue time as these tasks cannot be completed with their contracted hours. These periods, which can be spread over several days and weeks, include:

- The submission of entries
- Preparing for an exam series
- Each session/day within an exam series
- Managing and administering post-results enquiries

This raises the question of the ability of an exams officer to complete these tasks correctly and to deadline when they are given a reduced amount of time due to the requirement to fulfil an additional role.

4. Managing exam rooms

During an exam series an exams officer manages – on average – ten exam rooms per exam session. This number is significantly higher in larger centres such as Further Education colleges.

Managing this number of exam rooms during an exam series is a difficult task which takes a considerable amount of management and planning, and which raises the question of how an exams officer could effectively perform an additional role whilst they are undertaking such a critical role as rooming for an exam series.

5. Handling confidential exam materials

Another critical task which must be completed by an exams officer is overseeing the receipt, logging, moving, checking and storage of confidential exam materials ahead of an exam series.

Awarding bodies will send a range of confidential exam materials (including question papers) to centres, with a requirement that these highly secure assessment materials are handled in line with strict guidelines, which include defined timelines. If an exams officer is unable to handle confidential exam materials in line with JCQ regulations this will, very likely, be construed as maladministration.

Centres should ensure that their exams officer is able to handle these confidential materials upon arrival in their centre as a priority over the demands and requirements of any additional role.

6. Second pair of eyes check

During an exam series, an exams officer must ensure that in addition to the person removing the sealed question paper packets from secure storage (who will be very likely be the exams officer), another member of centre staff must check the day, date, time, subject, unit or component and tier of entry (if applicable) immediately before a question paper packet is opened. This check must be recorded. Any additional role which an exams officer must perform within their centre must not prevent them from undertaking – and recording – this second pair of eyes check.

7. Protecting integrity and security of the examination system against malpractice

One of the main responsibilities of an exams officer, as defined by JCQ, is to protect the integrity and security of the examination system within their centre. If an exams officer is not given the necessary time to ensure that their centre is complying with all the necessary JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements, then a centre may find that they are engaging in malpractice. This could lead to the imposition of sanctions from JCQ awarding bodies.

Senior leaders should consider whether an additional role will be preventing their exams officer from performing the tasks which maintain the integrity and security of the examination system within their centre. If this is the case, they should think very carefully about the risk that this is introducing and the possibility that their centre may be engaging in malpractice.

8. Centre budget

Whilst the decision to give an exams officer an additional role may be made to save money, centres must consider that this may be counterintuitive if delays are experienced or mistakes made in the management and administration of examinations and assessments. This could include the late submission of exam entry fees or having insufficient time to complete a range of key tasks to deadline.

Centres should also consider the potential cost of absence due to work overload or burnout and the subsequent impact of passing the responsibility of examinations to a colleague – who may be unaware of the JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements - at short notice.

9. A contract and remuneration

If an exams officer is required to undertake an additional role they should be remunerated for both roles with a contract which clearly states the role and responsibilities of each role...and how both roles can be delivered within the allocated time.

Senior leadership teams should ensure that the salary awarded reflects the role and responsibilities of all the roles performed by an exams officer. It is not acceptable to require an exams officer to perform an additional role based upon the exams officer salary alone.

The average exams officer salary ranges from £25-35,000 based upon location and the scale of the role (this will depend on the number of candidates, qualifications delivered etc.), and therefore, any salary for dual or multiple roles should be in excess of what would be awarded for the exams officer role alone.

10. Consistency and wellbeing

Finally, senior leaders should consider the question of fairness. If their exams officer is asked to perform another role, is this common practice within the centre, and are other staff members required to perform dual roles?

The NAO is recommending that the exams officer role should be redefined as the Head of Exams or Exams Manager due to the responsibilities and technical knowledge required to perform the role. Therefore, it should be viewed as on a par with the Finance Manager or Bursar, and senior leaders should consider whether it is appropriate for an exams officer/manager to be required to undertake another role when colleagues in roles with similar levels of responsibility are not required to perform an additional role.

In addition to consistency, it is imperative that centres ensure an exams officer's wellbeing is taken into account. The pressure placed upon exams officers when they are asked to perform more than just their core role must be acknowledged and monitored on a regular basis. If this creates pressure which impacts upon the exams officer's welfare, then this situation must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Conclusion

It is a centre decision as to whether an exams officer is required to undertake an additional role. However, this decision must be made after taking a range of factors into account including:

- not compromising a centre's ability to meet JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements, which may introduce unnecessary risk and damage the centre's reputation
- the welfare of the individual being asked to undertake a dual role
- displaying an understanding of the significance and scale of the exams officer role and that this is an all-year round role with very busy periods and tasks which must be completed as a priority and to strict deadlines
- potentially damaging the centre's reputations by adding unnecessary risk to the examination system within their centre as the ability of the exams officer to effectively deliver their duties in line with JCQ regulations role has been significantly impacted
- ensuring that a contract is in place which details the requirements and responsibilities of each role and how they can be performed within the contracted hours/time.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (End of September 2025)