



The exams officer journey and what's next for vocational qualifications

January Senior Leaders Exams Officer Conference 2026

Our agenda today

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Introduction

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A year in the life of your exams officer

Why they are important and how you can get ahead

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Supporting your exams teams

Best practices and insider know-how to help your summer run smoothly

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A sneak peek at some of the work we're doing

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Any Questions?

“This session gives senior leaders insight into the exams officer journey, explores practical ways to offer support, and looks ahead to upcoming changes in vocational qualifications.”

Who we are and how we can help



Support when you need it most

Vocational Qualification Customer Experience Team

Your partners in providing a supportive and smooth experience for Vocational Qualifications.

Working across customer services, data, comms and continuous improvement.

We're responsible for making sure we have all the information we need to deliver on time results in August.

Vocational Quality Assurance Managers

Supporting your quality nominee for everything quality assurance.

Deliver onboarding, training packages, handbooks and ongoing support.

[Meet your VQAM](#)

General Qualification Assessment

Your partners in providing a supportive and smooth assessment experience for General Qualifications.

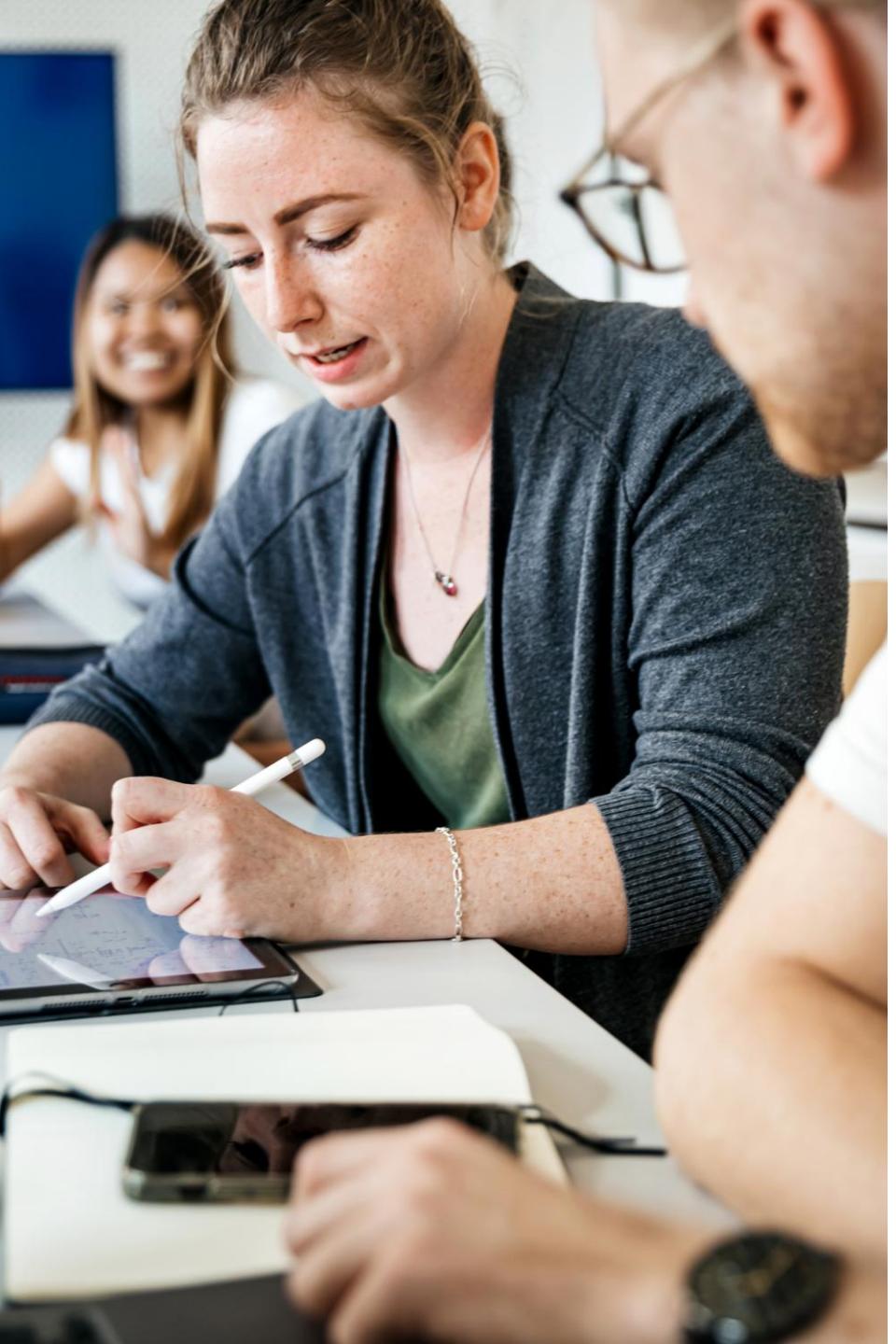
Working across customer services, comms and continuous improvement.

Customer services Specialists

Supporting exams officer's day-to-day queries, and are available through chat, phone or support portal.

A year in the life of your exams officer

Vocational Technical Qualifications (VTQs)



Autumn – Getting the foundations right

What's happening:

Confirming learner details with curriculum leads

Registering learners across multiple awarding body portals

Managing re-sit entries and late registrations

Updating centre policies and compliance documents

The pressure point:

"It's all about getting the data right from the start. If you miss a learner now, it creates problems months later."

How you can help:

Review and allocate resources – identify workload at peak times

Provide systems and technology support

Clarify roles and responsibilities – create RACI matrix

Establish regular communication – stakeholder termly meetings

Integrate VTQs into strategic planning



Winter into Spring – Assessment windows and quality assurance

What's happening:

Scheduling internal and external assessments

Coordinating with quality leads and assessors to meet submission deadlines

Supporting access arrangements and invigilation for externally assessed components

The pressure point:

“It can feel like spinning plates because there are always overlapping deadlines for entries, claims, and sampling windows. Communication between the exams office and curriculum teams is critical.”

How you can help:

Recognise the intensity of overlapping deadlines

Ensure relevant stakeholders are accountable for meeting deadlines



Summer – Assessment windows and quality assurance

What's happening:

Submitting results and claims through awarding organisation portals
Managing resit entries and late changes
Distributing certificates securely
Preparing for results analysis and reporting

The pressure point:

“By summer, we’re juggling both general qualifications and VTQ outcomes. They’re very different processes, but both equally important for learners’ progression.”

How you can help:

Recognise the intensity of overlapping deadlines
Post-cycle evaluation for continuous improvement

How you can support your exams team

Vocational qualifications

Successful certification requires a team effort!

How can you relieve exam officer pressure?

Hold programme data on a central shared area

Unit & student level tracking

Encourage regular meetings between the exams team, quality nominee (QN), and lead internal verifiers (lead IVs)

Build into centre's quality calendar
Consider interim grade claiming / special considerations

Set an earlier internal claims deadline

QN monitoring is essential for timely grade reporting and accurate claims

Identify subject designated contacts

On call during summer break for claim queries

How your quality nominee can help the exams team

GETTING STARTING

September - November



- Provide qualification list & unit breakdown
- Check qualification approval status
- Share key dates - year planners
- Support timely registrations & entries

CHECKING PROGRESS

September - May



Support with cohort declarations and term-time checkpoints:

- Registrations
- Estimated completion dates (ECDs)
- Withdrawals / deletions
- External assessment entries

SUCCESSFUL CLAIMS

May - August



- Confirm SV release
- QA checks of claims / rule of combination
- VQ learner tracker actions

Top tip:

Build any new processes adopted into your existing centre policies

The future of vocational qualifications



DfE's Post-16 Level 3 and Below Pathways consultation

V Levels

A third vocational pathway at Level 3: creating V Level qualifications. V Levels **will sit alongside A Levels and T Levels** and will offer a vocational alternative to these academic and technical routes.

Two new Level 2 pathways

Two new pathways at Level 2: simplifying the current offer and providing a clear line of sight to both **further study** at Level 3 and **skilled employment** through the:

- Further Study pathway
- Occupational pathway

Transition timeline in England

2025/2026

- ♦ No change.
- ♦ 180/360 GLH BTEC RQF& equiv. qualifications (where is now an AAQ) remain defunded, also applies to large sizes in Childcare & Construction.
- ♦ Phase 1a BTEC AAQs (360 GLH) & L2&3 TOEQs remain available for first teaching.

2027/2028

- ♦ Defunding of large BTEC & equiv. (720/1080 GLH) in subjects with a T Level, including: Engineering.
- ♦ First teach of phase 1 industry route(s): V Level, x2 Level 2 post-16 pathways.*
- ♦ Defunding of corresponding legacy vocational provision (at Level 2 and 3) in summer 2027.



2026/2027

- ♦ Defunding of large BTEC & equiv. (720/1080 GLH) in subjects with a T Level, including: Applied Science; Health & Social Care; IT/Computing in summer 2026.
- ♦ First teach of cycle 1b BTEC AAQs (180 GLH) & L2&3 TOEQs.

2028/2029

- ♦ First teach of phase 2 industry route(s): V Level, x2 Level 2 post-16 pathways.*
- ♦ Defunding of corresponding legacy vocational provision (at Level 2 and 3) in summer 2028.

Stage 5: 2029/2030

- ♦ First teach of phase 3 industry route(s): V Level, x2 Level 2 post-16 pathways.*
- ♦ Defunding of corresponding legacy vocational provision (at Level 2 and 3) in summer 2029.

STAGES 5 & 6

Stage 6: 2030/2031

- ♦ All industry routes (at Post-16 Level 2 and Level 3 V Levels available (inc. Phase 4).
- ♦ Summer 2030 last stage of defunding for corresponding legacy vocational provision (at Level 2 and 3).

*Timeline for phasing of industry routes to be published by DfE in 2026 (in government response to the consultation).

What are V Levels?

- For students who would like to explore sectors without specialising. Supporting breadth by studying multiple subjects.
- Aim to cover the core knowledge and skills related to an employment sector.
- Content linked to occupational standards.
- Provide an opportunity to progress to Higher Education, employment or apprenticeships.
- Will be applied in nature.
- One A Level in size (360 GLH). **No large sizes.**
- Will be able to take V Levels in multiple subjects and in combination with other qualifications (e.g. A Levels, or Level 2 English/Maths).
- No awarding organisation branding in titles.

Subject to further consultation

Ofqual:

- Grading scale (to be consistent across exam boards)
- Structure of V Levels
- Assessment model of V Levels (e.g. % external assessment by subject, approach to Non Examined Assessment)

DfE (in 2026):

- Subject criteria for V Level subjects

DfE's indicative V Level subject list

- Agriculture, Land Management & Production
- Animal Care & Management
- Animation, Games Design & Visual Effects
- Arts, Craft & Design
- Business, Administration & Management
- Construction & the Built Environment
- Criminology
- Digital
- Education & Early Years
- Engineering & Manufacturing
- Finance & Accounting
- Legal Services
- Hair, Beauty & Aesthetics
- Health & Care Services
- Hospitality & Catering
- Media, Broadcast & Production
- Music & Music Performance
- Performing Arts
- Protective Services
- Sales, Retail & Customer Service
- Science
- Sport & Exercise Science
- Travel & Tourism

DfE's potential new T Level categories

Introducing new T Levels where occupational standards exist

Examples:

- Sport science
- Care Services

Introducing new T Levels where occupational standards are not at Level 3

Examples:

- Music Technology
- Production Arts
- Visual Effects

Introducing new T Levels in subjects currently without occupational standards (at any level)

Examples:

- Art & Design
- Performing Arts
- Music Performance

DfE's post-16 Level 2 pathways

Occupational Certificates

- For students who want to follow a study for a particular occupation and need to develop their skills in a classroom-based setting, with the aim of progressing into employment in relevant Level 2 roles.
 - Two years full time
 - No set GLH
 - With broad occupational core + occupational specialism content
 - Set subject list

Further Study pathway

For students who want to pursue further Level 3 study, whether t Levels, V Levels or A Levels, but did not meet the entry requirements to progress directly, usually because they did not achieve the five grade 4s at GCSE, including English and Maths, at age 16. They therefore require more time to develop their knowledge and skills before moving up to the next level.

- One year
- 240 GLH (so English and Maths can be taken alongside)
- Set subject list

Supporting you through Curriculum Reform

Funding and Qualification Guidance

- Funding Guides, registration and support transferring learners
- Subject specific briefings
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Transition

- Sector by sector, expectation unlike other reforms we will see all qualifications across level 2 and 3 in a subject area replaced

Future Considerations to start planning for

- More mixed programmes.
- EO will work across departments as we see a learner doing mixed programmes
- Timetabling
- Resources

What to expect from Pearson

- Clear communications
- Early communicating of qualification withdrawal/ change of funding
- Briefings
- Consultation with EO to ensure new process and administration is as efficient as can be.

Any questions or feedback?



Thank you

Place contact info here