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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.

The Exams Office provides a [New Exams Officer Induction: Task completion checklist](#) which can be used as an introduction to the exams officer role.

In this article we consider five areas which new exams officers should focus upon/address in the initial weeks in role.

### 1. Induction

There are two strands of induction which a new exams officer needs to undertake – an induction to your centre and an induction to the world of examinations and assessments.

#### Centre 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.

#### Exams induction

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 section 1 is completed on your appointment to role. (Sections 2-6 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 which must be completed.

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

## 2. Stakeholders – support and information

Be aware of the role played by key stakeholders within the examinations sector, the requirements to administer their qualifications and the support they offer to exams officers.

The main exams-related stakeholders include:

- [Department for Education \(DfE\)](#) - responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy (including examinations and assessments), apprenticeships and wider skills in England
- [Ofqual](#) – the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. The equivalent in Wales is Qualifications Wales (QW), in Scotland the regulator is the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and regulation in Northern Ireland is overseen by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
- [Joint Council for Qualifications \(JCQ\)](#) - an organisation comprising of, and funded by, the eight largest qualifications providers in the UK, providing a single voice for these awarding organisations on examination administration and, where appropriate, qualification and wider education policy. JCQ sets many common regulations relating to the qualifications, examinations and assessments provided by the largest awarding organisations
- Awarding organisations - the providers of qualifications, examinations and assessments such as GCSEs, A levels, Scottish Highers and vocational qualifications to schools, colleges and other educational establishments. The eight largest awarding organisations in the UK are:
  - [AQA \(AQA Education Ltd\)](#)
  - [CCEA \(Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment\)](#)
  - [City & Guilds](#)
  - [NCFE](#)
  - [OCR \(Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations\)](#)
  - [Pearson](#)
  - [SQA \(Scottish Qualifications Authority\)](#)
  - [WJEC](#)
- [Federation of Awarding Bodies \(FAB\)](#) - an organisation representing non-JCQ awarding bodies delivering technical, vocational and industry-based qualifications
- Management Information System (MIS) providers – companies such as [ESS SIMS](#), [Bromcom](#) and [Arbor](#) provide schools/colleges with a system which collates and analyses student information
- [National Association of Examinations Officers \(NAEO\)](#) - a professional membership body representing the interests of examinations officers working in the UK
- [The Exams Office](#) – a membership organisation which supports centres (primarily through their exams officers) in ensuring that they are compliant with JCQ and awarding body regulations via a range of online tools, resources and training. The Exams Office also provides good practice, support and guidance to exams officers within schools/colleges.

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

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

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 should be aware of their role, if any, in the following CIS inspections:

- General inspection – a normally unannounced visit which usually takes place during a common exam series 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

The Exams Office has a dedicated support area on its website with links to 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 area of The Exams Office website as it will provide invaluable support for you during your first year in post. You should also login to the The Exams Office Hub to access a range of support resources, online tools and assessments.

### 3. Professional development

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.

#### Training – in person

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.

#### Training – online

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.

#### Exams officer conferences

New exams officers are strongly encouraged to attend [The Exams Office annual National Conference](#).

If your centre acquires a [membership to The Exams Office](#) you will 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 presentations delivered at the National Conference.

#### Network meetings

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.

AQA has also launched field support for exams officers.

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

## **4. Exam information**

New exams officers must become familiar with a range of exam-related information as quickly as possible in order to complete key tasks to deadline.

#### 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.

### Annual exams and qualifications plans

As planning is such a pivotal part of the exams officer role, the creation of an *annual exams plan* and *annual qualifications plan* will help to identify the qualifications taken by students at your centre and 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.

**Annual exams plan:** This provides a framework and starting point on which an exams officer can build a plan which details the key dates, deadlines and events across the academic year.

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 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.

**Annual qualifications plan:** Used in conjunction with the *information gathering form*, this provides a way of collating/summarising all the information gathered into one single point of reference, creating an *annual qualifications plan*.

### **5. 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 online calendar within The Exams Office Hub can also be utilised to record centre-specific information such as key tasks which have to be, or have been, undertaken. The calendar retains this user information and can be referred to in future years, and also acts as a contingency tool for staff who may have to cover the exams officer role in an emergency.

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 2024)*