

Key reminders for heads of centre and senior leaders responsible for exams in summer 2024

Heads of centre and senior leaders who have responsibility for exams play a vital role in ensuring exams and assessments run smoothly, enabling students to receive their results on time. As we head into the summer series, we wanted to help you by highlighting some of the key responsibilities for senior leaders in the coming months and how you can support your exams officer at this time.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for all the work you do to protect the integrity of the qualifications system and to wish your students well in their upcoming exams and assessments.

JCQ centre inspections



The JCQ Centre Inspection Service carries out inspections to support schools and colleges in delivering exams and to safeguard the integrity of the exam system.



To support your exams officer:

- try to be available when the JCQ Centre Inspector visits, particularly if your exams officer is new to role and this is their first summer exam series
- read the inspection report as this can provide important feedback.

Written policies



The written policies and procedures required by JCQ need to be up to date and available for inspection. The policies required for inspection are listed in the JCQ document [General Regulations for Approved Centres](#) (section 5.3z).



This summer, part of the JCQ Centre Inspector's visit will be to look at your centre's:

- exam contingency plan
- internal appeals procedure
- malpractice policy. This should reference the use of AI (e.g. what AI is, when it may be used and how it should be acknowledged, the risks of using AI, what AI misuse is and how this will be treated as malpractice). See the JCQ document [AI Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications](#).

Contingency planning



Your school or college needs to have an exam contingency plan (JCQ document [General Regulations for Approved Centres](#) section 5.3z). Members of the senior leadership team need to have a plan for what to do in the event of an emergency or absence of a key member of staff.



Check that your school or college's plan includes:

- a contingency for the exams officer suddenly being absent during the exam series – this is to enable exams to run smoothly
- an alternative site to conduct exams should your school or college site suddenly become unavailable, with the name of the alternative site(s) written in your contingency plan
- a plan if there is an IT system failure or cyber-attack during the exam series or during the results period.

Cyber security



It's vital schools and colleges mitigate the risk of cyber-attacks and stay alert for all types of social engineering/phishing attempts.



- Talk to the person responsible for maintaining cyber security and make sure your school or college is meeting the [DfE Cyber security guidance](#).
- Familiarise yourself with the [JCQ Guidance for centres on cyber security](#), which provides account management and cyber security best practice.¹
- Check that your exams officer has what they need to access awarding body secure websites, e.g. two- or multi-factor authentication.

¹ For schools and colleges in Northern Ireland where there is a managed service, the Cyber Security Newsletter on C2k Exchange (EN194) should be referred to. Queries can be logged with the C2k Service Desk.

For schools and colleges in Wales the guidance published by Welsh Government, which includes cyber security, should be referred to :> [Guidance for schools to implement the information management strategy](#)

Security of question paper materials



Schools and colleges play a critical role in maintaining the security of question papers and other secure assessment materials including electronic question papers.



Check that question papers are only being handled by authorised members of staff and that those staff:

- understand their roles and responsibilities
- are familiar with the [JCQ requirements](#), e.g. that two authorised members of staff check question paper packets before they are opened
- follow any specific awarding body instructions.

Supporting your exams officer



Managing the summer exams requires extensive planning and resourcing. Your exams officer will be working hard to ensure exams run smoothly. The support senior leaders provide during this critical period is vital, particularly if your exams officer is new to role. The key document for managing and conducting exams is the JCQ document [Instructions for conducting examinations \(ICE\)](#), which must be followed by all staff involved in exams administration.



- Be aware of the exam timetable. Check whether your exams officer needs support from senior leaders for specific exam days, e.g. larger entry subjects or significant timetable clashes.
- Be available for your exams officer – they may have a query or situation that needs a decision or guidance from the senior leadership team.
- Make sure all relevant staff, including invigilators, are familiar with the JCQ document [Instructions for conducting examinations \(ICE\)](#).
- If something unexpected happens and you are unsure what to do, your centre can call the awarding body for guidance.

Special consideration



Special consideration is a post-exam adjustment to a student's mark or grade to reflect temporary illness or injury or some other event outside the student's control at the time of the assessment. You may have students who are present for an exam but disadvantaged or absent from an exam for an acceptable reason.



- Your exams officer may need your support when working with students and parents/carers on complex requests.
- Senior leaders will need to approve the supporting evidence for special consideration applications.
- Familiarise yourself with the JCQ document [A guide to the special consideration process](#).

Malpractice



Schools and colleges must do everything they can to prevent centre and candidate malpractice. In most cases of suspected malpractice, awarding bodies will liaise directly with the head of centre, who must make sure all cases of suspected malpractice are reported to the relevant awarding body.



- Support your exams officer with suspected malpractice investigations. Where appropriate, keep them informed of the progress and outcomes of investigations.
- To help prevent malpractice, make sure students know what malpractice is and the possible penalties an awarding body may apply.
- Also make sure students understand your school or college's instructions about mobile phones during exams. The most common form of malpractice in 2023 involved mobile phones and other communication devices.
- Familiarise yourself with the JCQ document [Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures](#).

Responding to awarding body requests for information



There are a range of deadlines that schools and colleges must meet as part of the assessment process. The awarding organisations may also request information that is vital in ensuring your students receive their results on time. This may involve significant collaboration between your exams officer and teaching colleagues and may require the support of senior leaders.

If your school or college offers vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs), Ofqual's [VTQ Information Hub](#) provides in one place awarding body key dates and deadlines for Level 3, Level 1/2, Level 2 VTQs used for progression and taken alongside or in place of A Levels and GCSEs.²



- Check with your exams officer that everything is in place for students to receive their results as planned, and whether they need your support with other colleagues to meet the deadlines and/or requests from awarding bodies.
- Check that your school or college has responded to the awarding bodies' request for a senior designated contact over the summer holiday for urgent results-related issues only. See the [JCQ awarding body centre contact arrangements for summer 2024](#).

² Senior leaders in Northern Ireland can also use Ofqual's VTQ Information Hub for AQA, City & Guilds, NCFE, OCR, Pearson and WJEC qualifications as well as CCEA's website.