

NAEO April article

Why every centre should appoint an exams assistant ahead of the summer exam series

The 2025 Exams Officer survey highlighted several key areas where additional support is needed to help exams managers/officers carry out their duties effectively and to uphold the integrity and security of the examination system within centres.

The findings showed that many exams managers/officers require greater support to perform their role effectively and work efficiently. Key statistics include:

- 81.9% of exams managers/officers spent more time working on implementing access arrangements during the 2024/2025 academic year compared to the previous academic year
- 79.3% of exams managers/officers spent more time administering examinations during the 2024/2025 academic year compared to the previous academic year
- 78.3% of exams managers/officers spent more time on exam administration during the 2024/2025 academic year compared to the previous academic year
- 64.7% of centres do not have adequate succession planning, and/or support for a new exams manager/officer, in place if their current exams manager/officer were to decide to leave their role
- 58% of exams managers/officers saw an increase in the use of word processors in examinations compared to previous years
- 52.1% of exams managers/officers perform an additional role within their centre
- 49.6% of exams managers/officers do not receive any support/assistance in performing/undertaking their role
- 40.9% of exams managers/officers believe that key staff within their centre (e.g. the head of centre/senior leadership team/line manager) believe that they are only required/busy when examinations are taking place within their centre
- 33.9% of centres do not have adequate contingency plans in place in their centre if their exams manager/officer were to be absent during a critical period (e.g. entry deadline, during an exam series, results day, etc.)
- 17.3% of exams managers/officers engage with six or more awarding organisations
- 14.5% of exams managers/officers found the volume of external examinations/assessments delivered in their centre during the 2024/2025 academic year to be unmanageable or difficult to manage
- On average, an exams manager/officer will manage 9.6 examination rooms during an exam session

These statistics show that many centres would benefit significantly from appointing someone to support their exams manager/officer, particularly during the busiest points of the exam cycle. Additional support is also essential for maintaining the integrity and security of the examination system.

Where an exams manager/officer is already carrying out another role within the centre, the need for an additional member of staff becomes even stronger to ensure that all tasks are completed accurately and on time.

This article outlines three key reasons why every centre should appoint an exams assistant - at a minimum - before the summer exam series.

Supporting the exams manager/officer role

There are specific times during the academic year (and exam cycle) when an exams manager/officer is exceptionally busy and requires additional support. These include when:

- Planning for an exam series to complete tasks including:
 - Identifying key dates and deadlines
 - Creating annual exams and qualification plans
 - Acquiring qualification/candidate information from teaching staff and managing/updating this information
 - Sharing exam and assessment information with candidates, parents/carers and centre staff
 - Demonstrating the receipt, secure movement, checking and secure storage of question papers and other confidential materials
 - Confirming arrangements relating to the secure exam room and secure storage facility
 - Supporting the creation, updating and reviewing of exam-related policies
 - Planning and preparing for relevant tasks associated with access arrangements
 - Recruiting, training and deploying invigilators
- Making exam entries/registrations, particularly when several qualification types (with differing entry structures) are taken within a centre, or there are a large number of candidates taking examinations
- Preparing for an exam series (for example, completing tasks relating to the facilitation of access arrangements; managing confidential assessment materials; timetabling, rooming and seating arrangements; sharing exam

information and guidance; training and scheduling invigilators; administering non-exam assessments)

- During an exam series (for example, preparing examination rooms, organising exam room materials and documentation, directing invigilators, handling question papers, undertaking the ‘second pair of eyes’ check, handling instances of malpractice and irregularity, dealing with special consideration cases/applications, dealing with the JCQ general inspection, packing and sending exam scripts)
- Preparing for, and during, a results day
- Managing post-results enquiries/requests

Other activities and situations which may require additional support include involvement in mock examinations and/or managing resilience arrangements.

Protecting the integrity and security of the examination system

The NAEO recommends that centres provide additional support for their exams manager/officer to help maintain the integrity and security of the examination system.

An exams assistant can help a centre meet JCQ requirements by acting as a contingency measure if the exams manager/officer is absent and can also play a key role in succession planning when an exams manager/officer leaves their post.

Effective succession planning - also a JCQ requirement - is particularly important for supporting new exams managers/officers during their early days and weeks in the role. Providing this support may also help reduce the high turnover of exams office personnel, as a lack of initial support is often cited as a major reason why many leave the role within their first year.

Meeting JCQ regulations

The head of centre must be aware that when signing the annual *Head of Centre declaration* they are confirming compliance with Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) regulations and guidelines. This declaration ensures the integrity and security of the examination and assessment system within their centre.

JCQ’s *General Regulations for Approved Centres* (section 5.3) require the head of centre to ensure that:

- the centre’s contingency planning must include succession arrangements for members of staff involved in examination and assessment administration

- the centre's examinations officer understands relevant awarding body and JCQ documentation and has sufficient time to perform their role.
- the examinations officer is supported, as well as ensuring effective centre decision making in line with the published regulations

If the exams manager/officer does not have sufficient time to carry out their role effectively before and during an exam day/session, or needs support with key tasks - such as preparing multiple examination rooms, completing the second-pair-of-eyes checks across several rooms, or preparing question papers for candidates with approved access arrangements - a centre should consider appointing an exams assistant to meet JCQ requirements.

An exams assistant can also undertake essential responsibilities, including serving as one of the minimum two members of staff (in addition to the exams manager/officer) who should be authorised to handle secure electronic materials.