

Why exams officers should not invigilate during an exam series

In recent years, a growing number of exams officers have been asked to take on invigilation duties during an exam series. This shift is driven by several factors:

- **Recruitment challenges:** Many centres are struggling to hire enough invigilators to meet demand
- **Contingency planning:** Senior leaders, including heads of centre, often view the exams officer as a contingency measure to cover a shortage of invigilators
- **Cost-saving measures:** Some centres deploy exams officers as invigilators to reduce expenditure on external staffing

This article explores the circumstances under which an exams officer may be required to invigilate and examines the potential risks and implications of undertaking the role of invigilator during an exam series.

JCQ regulations

JCQ does not provide any definitive guidance on exams officers acting as invigilators in the JCQ regulations. This is a centre decision.

The *Instructions for conducting examinations* document (sections 12.8 and 12.11) includes the following in relation to who can/cannot and must/must not invigilate during an examination:

- Invigilators must be suitably qualified and experienced adults
- Any relative, friend or peer of a candidate in the examination room must not be the sole invigilator
- Current students at the centre cannot act as invigilators
- A teacher, a teaching assistant, a tutor or a senior member of staff who teaches the subject being examined, or a learning support assistant, who has supported one or more candidates, wherever possible is not an invigilator during the examination*
- Timed Art examinations will normally be invigilated by an Art and Design teacher

** In exceptional circumstances, a teaching assistant or a learning support assistant, who has supported one or more candidates in the room, may act as an invigilator. However, they must not be the sole invigilator. Where a candidate with a particular need is accommodated in another room and their allocated teaching assistant or learning support assistant must act as the invigilator, another invigilator will be required*

The view of the NAEO

The National Association of Examinations Officers (NAEO) maintains a clear position: **exams officers should not act as invigilators during an examination series**, except in exceptional circumstances. This guidance is designed to uphold the integrity and security of the examination process within centres.

The NAEO's stance that exams officers should not act as invigilators during an examination series is based upon the critical responsibilities of exams officers on exam days. These include overseeing compliance, managing logistics, and responding to emerging issues - tasks that

cannot be fulfilled if the exams officer is confined to the exam room for the duration of an assessment.

Exceptional circumstances

Permissible exceptions where an exams officer may invigilate include:

- The absence of a scheduled invigilator at short notice
- An 'on demand' or standalone examination with only a small number of candidates outside of the summer exam series when it may be less of a logistical challenge, or risk, if the exams officer opted to invigilate
- Within centres with a small number of staff (for example, a Pupil Referral Unit) where it is common for staff to undertake several duties/roles)

New exams officers

The NAEO recommends that newly appointed exams officers - particularly those who begin their role in the first half of the autumn term - undertake invigilator training and participate in the November exam series as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and induction to their new role. This is encouraged for three key reasons:

- **To deepen their understanding of JCQ regulations**, as outlined in the *Instructions for Conducting Examinations* document
- **To gain insight into the invigilator role and common exam room scenarios**, which will enhance their ability to train and support the invigilation team ahead of the summer series
- **To avoid the need to brief existing invigilators on regulatory updates** when they themselves may lack the experience and confidence to do so effectively

Roving invigilator

When an invigilator is also acting as a practical assistant, prompter, reader, or scribe on a one-to-one basis with a candidate, the centre must appoint a roving invigilator to ensure that all JCQ regulations are being adhered to.

The exams officer may fulfil this role, entering the room at regular intervals to:

- Monitor the conduct of the examination
- Ensure full compliance with JCQ regulations
- Support the integrity of the access arrangement(s) being delivered

It is not only acceptable but often preferable for the exams officer to act as the roving invigilator as this provides a valuable opportunity to check on all exam rooms, address any issues promptly, and ensure that procedures are being followed consistently, effectively and in line with JCQ regulations.

Ten reasons why an exams officers should not act as an invigilator

Senior leaders and heads of centre must recognise that **exams officers play a critical operational role** on exam days. Their responsibilities extend far beyond the exam room and are essential to maintaining the integrity, compliance, and smooth running of examinations.

Below are **ten key reasons** why an exams officer should **not** be deployed as an invigilator. These points should be considered carefully before placing pressure on an exams officer to invigilate:

Reason/scenario 1

- The JCQ Centre Inspector arrives

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Meet and greet the Inspector
- Accompany the Inspector, answer their questions and present any documentation as requested (for example, exam-related policies, a record of the content of the training given to invigilators, etc.) throughout the course of the centre visit, including an inspection of the centre's secure room/secure storage facility and exam room(s)

Reason/scenario 2

- There is a suspected or an actual issue with the question paper

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Enter the exam room to address any concerns raised by candidates – valid or invalid – when summoned by the invigilator
- Verify the error or omission with the relevant subject teacher before reporting the matter to the relevant awarding body

Reason/scenario 3

- An invigilator informs the centre, at very short notice, that they are unable to invigilate, or they fall ill during an exam

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Ratio of invigilators-to-candidates as stipulated by the JCQ in section 12.8 of *Instructions for conducting examinations* must be maintained. In this instance, the exams officer should be available as a 'contingency measure' to act as an emergency invigilator... assuming that the individual is fully trained and aware of any changes to regulations for the current academic year

Reason/scenario 4

- There is a major disruption in the exam room before, during or at the end of the examination (including the need for an emergency evacuation)

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Ensure that all rooms are evacuated
- Deal with any issues when summoned by the invigilator
- In extreme situations where the exam cannot be restarted, contact the awarding body for guidance

Reason/scenario 5

- A candidate arrives with a temporary indisposition (e.g. broken limb) and requires an emergency access arrangement

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Deal with the candidate – address any concerns the candidate may have and assess if the indisposition impacts their ability to sit the examination
- Assess any access arrangement/adjustment(s) which may be required
- If required, allocate and organise an alternative rooming arrangement
- Organise an appropriately trained member of staff to facilitate any relevant access arrangement and/or to act as the invigilator
- If required, apply for approval for the arrangement(s) through *Access Arrangements Online* (AAO)

Scenario Reason/scenario 6

- A candidate arrives for an exam feeling unwell or is extremely distressed

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Keep the candidate calm and comfortable and under centre supervision from the required time if alternative seating, rooming or access arrangement(s) need to be put in place
- If required, arrange alternative rooming and access arrangement(s)
- Make any change that may be required to the seating arrangements
- Inform invigilator(s) if the candidate may need to leave the exam room temporarily under supervision

Scenario Reason/scenario 7

- A candidate is absent from an exam

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Instigate/apply the centre policy for dealing with candidate absence
- Contact (or direct relevant centre staff to contact) the candidate to ensure that they arrive at the earliest possible opportunity (if this is the centre's policy)

Scenario Reason/scenario 8

- A candidate arrives late for an exam

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Instigate/apply the centre's policy for candidates who arrive late for an examination
- Brief the candidate on any erratum notice(s) and JCQ regulations (e.g. highlight the contents of the *Unauthorised items* and *Warning to candidates* posters)
- Ensure that invigilators are aware that if the candidate is permitted to sit the exam, then they must be allowed the full time for the exam
- Ensure that a trained invigilator is available to allow the candidate the full working time to complete their examination, as they will continue after the normal finishing time

Scenario Reason/scenario 9

- A candidate arrives very late for an exam

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Instigate/apply the centre's policy for candidates who arrive more than one hour after the awarding body's published starting time for an exam of more than one hour (after 10am for a morning exam and after 2.30pm for an afternoon exam)
- Inform the parent/carer of the required supervision arrangements where prior notification of a possible late arrival is given to the centre
- Record the time the candidate came under centre supervision, brief the candidate on any erratum notice(s) and JCQ regulations (e.g., the possession of any unauthorised items) and warn the candidate that the relevant awarding body may not accept their script for marking

Scenario Reason/scenario 10

- A candidate is suspected of or commits malpractice

Actions to be taken by the exams officer

- Deal with any instances of alleged/suspected/actual malpractice during the examination when summoned by the invigilator
- At the end of the exam, quietly instruct the candidate(s) to remain in the exam room, inform the candidate(s) that a report will be made to the relevant awarding body and warn of the possible penalties an awarding body may apply (which could include disqualification) and allow the candidate the opportunity to provide a written statement

Conclusion

While centres may choose to diverge from best practice, doing so should only follow careful consideration of the risks and responsibilities involved. If an exams officer is assigned to invigilate, senior leaders must ensure that a suitably trained individual is available to manage any issues that arise, particularly those which may be defined as centre malpractice or maladministration.

Ultimately, the core priorities during any examination series are clear:

- Safeguard the integrity and security of the examination process
- Minimise risks/deal with issues and scenarios which may occur during an exam day/session
- Create optimal conditions for candidates to perform at their best

If these priorities cannot be upheld because the exams officer is confined to the exam room, the decision is straightforward: **The exams officer should not invigilate during an examination series.**

(This article was published in November 2025)