

NAEO article – January 2026

The outcomes from the annual exams officer survey

The 2025 exams officer survey took place between 29 September and 31 October 2025, with 1400 exams officers providing responses. This represents 20-25% of all exams officers.

It should be noted that new exams officers are less likely to participate, and therefore, the feedback is more representative of those established within the role.

Issues

The main areas of concern amongst the exams officer community include (in order of significance):

- Arranging exam rooms – including as a result of the number of students with access arrangements
- Number of different systems used by awarding organisations
- Dealing with parental/candidate requests for alternative rooming/general access arrangements
- Sourcing, recruiting and training invigilators
- Printing of question papers onto coloured paper
- Number of different deadlines for the different awarding organisations

Outcomes

The main outcomes of the 2025 survey are:

Salaries

Exams officer salaries have continued to rise, with 62% now earning over £30,000 per year.

While the NAEO welcomes this more appropriate remuneration, it should be viewed in context: the average UK full-time salary is approximately £37,000 (according to The Workers Union).

For comparison, the National Living Wage from April 2025 is £12.21 per hour for workers aged 21 and over which equates to **£25,396 per year** for a 40-hour working week.

Employment status

Contract

The majority of exams officers (63%) are employed on a **term-time only contract**, with additional weeks allocated for tasks such as receiving and distributing examination results. While this arrangement may suit both the centre and, in some cases, the exams officer, it presents several challenges which may impact operational efficiency and staff well-being. These include:

- **Incomplete tasks or unresolved issues** which occur during non-term time periods
- **Unpaid or unofficial overtime** being used to address critical issues which occur at short notice during non-term time

Notice period

The majority of exams officers (62%) are required to provide a notice period of **one month or less** upon leaving their role. In comparison:

- **17%** must provide **two months' notice**
- **16%** are required to give **three months' notice**

A short notice period of one month or less significantly reduces the likelihood of a proper handover to the incoming exams officer. This is particularly critical when the new appointee has no prior experience in the role, as insufficient transition time can lead to operational challenges during examination cycles.

Union membership

A significant proportion of exams officers lack trade union representation. **59% of exams officers are not members of a trade union**, leaving them vulnerable to potential issues such as:

- Unfair treatment regarding wages and benefits
- Lack of formal representation if they experience an employment-related issue within their centre

This absence of union membership may impact their ability to negotiate fair working conditions and access support during disputes.

Workload trends

Exams officer workload continues to rise. Eight out of ten exams officers reported an increase in the time spent on exam administration compared to the previous academic year, with **38% experiencing a significant increase** during 2024/25 compared to 2023/24.

Additional findings include:

- **78%** of exams officers stated that the overall staff time dedicated to exam administration has increased compared to 2023/24
- Despite these pressures, **86%** of exams officers found the volume of external examinations and assessments delivered in their centre during 2024/25 to be manageable

Additional roles

Since the end of the pandemic, the proportion of exams officers taking on extra responsibilities has remained unchanged. Over half (52%) are required to perform tasks beyond their core role, most commonly involving data management and administration. Exams officers in the **North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside**, and the **West Midlands** are the most likely to have these additional duties.

While the NAEO acknowledges that many centres assign extra responsibilities to exams officers, this should be considered in context:

- These additional tasks must not compromise the essential duties of managing, administering, and conducting examinations and assessments
- Exams officers should receive adequate support during peak examination periods

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Since September 2025, it has been a JCQ requirement for exams officers to undertake regular CPD. However, **11% of exams officers are not given the opportunity to complete an annual professional appraisal or CPD**, although this figure has improved from **25% in the previous academic year**.

Regionally, the issue is more pronounced in the **North East**, where **22% of exams officers are denied the opportunity to engage in CPD**. This highlights a need for consistent implementation of JCQ requirements across all regions to ensure professional development and compliance.

Training and Support

One in five exams officers do not receive appropriate training and support to ensure the effective delivery of examinations and assessments and compliance with JCQ regulations.

Regional variations are evident:

- Exams officers in **London (within the M25)** and the **South East** are most likely to receive appropriate training and support
- Exams officers in the **North East** are least likely to receive such support

Additionally, **13% of exams officers have had a request for support** - such as attending an external training event, network meeting, or membership to The Exams Office - refused by their head of centre or relevant senior leader. This figure rises to **24% in the North East**, highlighting significant regional disparities in access to professional development opportunities.

Support for exams officers

The exams officer role

Half of all exams officers report having **no support in their role**, which poses a significant risk to operational continuity. The absence of support can impact contingency arrangements and create serious issues for centres if an exams officer is absent during a critical stage of the examination cycle.

Regionally, the problem is more pronounced in:

- **Yorkshire and Humberside** – 64% of exams officers have no support
- **North East** – 58% of exams officers have no support

This lack of support highlights the need for centres to implement robust contingency planning and ensure adequate assistance for exams officers, particularly during peak examination periods.

Contingency and succession planning

The survey reveals significant gaps in contingency and succession planning within centres:

- **Contingency planning**
One in three centres lack adequate contingency arrangements if an exams officer were absent during a critical period, such as entry deadlines, exam series, or results day.
- **Succession planning**
65% of centres have inadequate succession plans should an exams officer leave their role. This issue is particularly acute in **East Anglia**, where **72% of centres** report inadequate succession planning.

These findings highlight the need for centres to implement robust strategies to ensure continuity and operational stability during examination cycles.

Line management/Senior leadership support

The survey highlights significant concerns regarding line management and leadership support for exams officers:

- **Line Management Structure**
Almost one in ten exams officers do not have a line manager, or their line manager is not a member of the Senior Leadership Team within their centre.
- **Knowledge and Expertise**
Nearly one in three senior leaders/line managers responsible for examinations lack a good working knowledge of the examination system.
- **Perceived Support**
One in five exams officers do not feel well-supported or valued by their senior leadership team or line manager. This figure rises to one in three in the **North East** and one in four in **Yorkshire and Humberside**.
- **Misconceptions About Role**
Over 40% of key staff within centres (e.g., head of centre, senior leadership team, line manager) believe exams officers are only required or busy during examination periods. This misconception increases to 53% in the **North East**.
- **Training and Compliance**
46% of senior leaders with overall responsibility for examinations do not receive appropriate training and support to ensure effective delivery and compliance with JCQ regulations.
- **Understanding JCQ Regulations**
41% of senior leaders responsible for examination administration fail to read, refer to, or fully understand the relevant JCQ documents, including *General Regulations for Approved Centres*, *Instructions for conducting examinations*, and *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments*.

Management Information Systems (MIS) Trends

Over the past 12 months, a significant shift has occurred in the use of Management Information Systems (MIS) within centres. The number of centres using **ESS systems (e.g., SIMS)** has declined sharply - from **52% at the end of the pandemic to 32%**. In contrast, adoption of alternative systems has increased:

- **Arbor** usage rose from **10% to 26%**
- **Bromcom** usage increased from **11% to 23%**

This trend has created two key challenges for exams officers:

1. System familiarity – When moving between centres, exams officers are now more likely to encounter a MIS they have not previously used, increasing training and adaptation requirements.
2. Provider support – MIS providers gaining market share must ensure their support services meet the needs of users, particularly during critical examination periods.

Cyber security awareness and confidence

Following an update to JCQ requirements relating to cyber security since September 2025, the survey indicates strong awareness of JCQ's cyber security guidance among centres, with **95% confirming familiarity**. However, awareness of guidance provided by the **National Cyber Security Centre** is significantly lower, at only **42%**.

In terms of individual understanding, **54% of exams officers** report having a good understanding of cyber security practices, such as preventing cyber-attacks or reducing their impact.

Confidence in centre-level cyber security measures is high, with **nine out of ten exams officers** feeling either somewhat confident (51%) or very confident (40%) in their centre's approach.

Invigilators

Over two-thirds of centres report an increase in their administrative workload related to sourcing, recruiting, and training invigilators compared to the previous academic year. This issue is most pronounced in:

- **North East** – 76% of centres
- **East Anglia** – 70% of centres

This trend highlights growing operational pressures on centres and the need for improved strategies to manage invigilator recruitment and training efficiently.

Access Arrangements

The survey highlights a significant increase in workload and complexity related to access arrangements:

- Supervised rest breaks
Compared to the previous academic year, **44% of centres** reported a significant increase in the number of supervised rest breaks granted to candidates, while **81%** reported a slight or significant increase overall. This trend is most pronounced in the **North East**, where **56% of centres** reported a significant increase. Additionally, **57% of selective schools** (e.g., Grammar Schools) reported a significant increase in supervised rest breaks.
- Time spent on access arrangements
82% of exams officers spent more time implementing access arrangements for exams and assessments in 2024/25 than in the previous year. This figure rises to **95% in FE colleges**, indicating a substantial increase in workload in this sector.
- Insufficient time for collaboration
46% of exams officers feel they do not have sufficient time to work with the SENCo and other staff to apply for and provide access arrangements or reasonable adjustments. This issue is more acute in the **North East (62%)** and **FE colleges (63%)**.
- Increased use of word processors
58% of exams officers reported an increase in word processor use during exams and assessments in 2024/25 compared to previous years, with this figure rising to **69% in the North East**.

Awarding body support

The survey highlights notable differences in the perceived quality of support provided by awarding bodies:

- Web support
55% of exams officers state that **AQA offers the best support via their website/secure site**, compared to 23% for Pearson and 21% for Cambridge OCR.
- Face-to-face (network) support
65% of exams officers believe **Cambridge OCR provides the best face-to-face network support**, followed by AQA (25%) and Pearson (10%).
- Training Support (online or face-to-face)
41% of exams officers rate **Cambridge OCR as offering the best training support**, with AQA at 35% and Pearson at 24%.

Conclusion

The findings from the latest annual exams officer survey reveal a complex picture of the exams officer role, marked by progress in some areas and persistent challenges in others.

Salaries have improved, with most exams officers earning over £30,000 per year, yet this financial gain is offset by increasing workloads and limited support structures. Over half of exams officers take on additional responsibilities - often in data management - while many work

under term-time only contracts with short notice periods, highlighting the demanding and often inflexible nature of the role.

Operational pressures are evident, with significant increases in administrative tasks, particularly around invigilator recruitment and access arrangements. Despite these challenges, most exams officers report that the overall volume of examinations remains manageable. However, time constraints and insufficient collaboration with the SENCo and other SEN staff continue to hinder effective implementation of access arrangements.

Professional development opportunities have improved overall, but regional disparities persist, with the North East notably disadvantaged in CPD access and training. Leadership gaps remain a concern: many senior leaders lack adequate knowledge of examination systems and fail to engage fully with JCQ regulations, undermining compliance and operational resilience. Furthermore, half of exams officers report having no support in their role, and a significant proportion feel undervalued by senior leadership.

Contingency and succession planning are inadequate in most centres, posing risks during critical periods. While awareness of JCQ cyber security guidance is high, knowledge of broader national standards is limited, indicating a need for further training. Awarding bodies vary in their support provision, with AQA leading in online resources and Cambridge OCR excelling in face-to-face and training support.

Overall, these findings underscore the need for targeted action: improving training and leadership engagement, strengthening contingency planning, addressing regional inequalities in CPD, and ensuring exams officers receive the support and recognition required to deliver examinations effectively and compliantly.