

Reconsidering the Job Title: Exams Officer vs Exams Manager

In recent years, the scope and complexity of the Exams Officer role has grown significantly. In response, the **National Association of Examinations Officers (NAEO)** is encouraging senior leaders and key stakeholders to reflect on whether the title *Exams Officer* still accurately represents the responsibilities of the role.

The NAEO proposes that it may be time to reclassify the position as *Exams Manager*.

While some may view a change in title as merely symbolic, the NAEO argues that aligning the job title with the actual duties is an important step toward elevating the role's status and recognition within the education sector. The current title may undervalue the strategic, compliance-driven, and operational responsibilities now expected of exams professionals.

This article outlines **ten key factors** supporting the case for recognising Exams Officers as Exams Managers.

1. Responsibility for the conducting of examinations/assessments

The role of the Exams Officer carries significant responsibility and should not be underestimated. While teaching staff focus on delivering curriculum content within their subject areas, the Exams Officer oversees the administration and delivery of all examinations and assessments across every qualification and subject offered by the centre.

In many cases, the Exams Officer serves as the sole point of accountability for the secure and compliant conduct of all examinations. The importance of this role - and the potential consequences of errors or non-compliance - are comparable to, and in some cases exceed, the responsibilities held by teaching staff.

2. Managing risk

Students (candidates)

An Exams Officer is required to carry out a series of critical tasks within strict deadlines and in full compliance with examination regulations. These responsibilities are essential to ensuring that students:

- Are correctly entered for all relevant qualifications
- Sit their exams under appropriate and regulated conditions
- Receive accurate and timely results
- Have access to post-results services, including enquiries about results, where applicable

Failure to complete these tasks effectively and efficiently can have serious consequences for students. Errors or delays may lead to candidates being disadvantaged, potentially affecting their future education, training, or employment opportunities. It is therefore imperative that the

Exams Officer maintains rigorous oversight and risk management throughout the examination cycle to safeguard student outcomes.

Financial

The exams budget is often one of the largest areas of expenditure within a centre. It is not uncommon for schools to spend over £100,000 per academic year on exam entries, with Further Education colleges typically spending significantly more.

While an Exams Officer may not be able to reduce the overall cost of entries, they play a critical role in preventing unnecessary additional charges. By ensuring that all entries, withdrawals, and amendments are submitted in line with awarding body deadlines, the Exams Officer helps the centre avoid late and high late entry or amendment fees.

This responsibility is essential. Unplanned penalty fees can have a substantial financial impact on the centre. It is therefore vital that the Exams Officer applies their expertise to manage and mitigate this risk effectively, ensuring the exams budget is used as efficiently as possible.

Centre reputation

The Exams Officer plays a critical role in managing the five key stages of the exam cycle: **Planning, Entries, Exam Preparation, Exam Time, and Results and Post-Results**. Each stage must be completed accurately and within the required timeframes to ensure compliance with awarding body regulations and to protect the integrity of the examination process.

Failure to carry out these responsibilities correctly can result in serious consequences, including:

- **Malpractice or maladministration**
- **Disadvantaging students** through errors or delays
- **Reputational damage** to the centre, both in the short term (e.g. negative publicity) and long term (e.g. loss of trust from parents, students, and the wider community)

By fulfilling their duties diligently, the Exams Officer safeguards the centre's reputation and ensures that examinations and assessments are conducted to the highest standards of integrity and professionalism.

3. Technical/regulation knowledge and expertise

To carry out the role of Exams Officer successfully, an individual must possess a thorough understanding of exam regulations and procedures – from the requirements of their centre's secure room and secure storage facility to dealing with a range of exam-related scenarios before, during and after an exam series.

Unlike many other centre staff, an Exams Officer must adhere to a strict regulatory framework which requires a detailed knowledge of the following JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) documents:

- *General Regulations for Approved Centres*

- *Instructions for conducting examinations*
- *A guide to the special consideration process*
- *A guide to the awarding bodies' appeals processes*
- *Exam Room Posters*
- *Information for candidates documents*
- *Key dates in the examination cycle*
- *Post-Results Services*
- *Suspected Malpractice: Policies and Procedures*

JCQ-required exam policies

Exams Officers must actively contribute to the development, implementation, and maintenance of the following JCQ-required policies:

- **Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy:** Provide exam-related scenarios and coordinate invigilator training
- **Complaints Policy:** Outline procedures for submitting entries, conducting exams, sharing results, and handling post-results enquiries
- **Contingency Plan:** Detail responsibilities and tasks in case of absence during any stage of the exam cycle
- **Data Protection Policy:** Ensure compliance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 regarding exam-related data
- **Internal Appeals Procedure:** Inform senior leaders about processes and deadlines for clerical re-checks, reviews of marking/moderation, and appeals
- **Malpractice Policy:** Promote awareness of malpractice risks, educate candidates, and define escalation procedures within the centre
- **Whistleblowing Policy:** Provide examples of exam-related activities that may require whistleblowing
- **Use of Word Processors Policy:** Confirm arrangements for using word processors during assessments
- **Candidate Identification Procedures:** Recommend appropriate methods for verifying candidate identity during exams
- **Post-Results Services Procedures:** Clarify how candidates can request access to scripts, clerical re-checks, reviews of marking, reviews of moderation and appeals, including timelines and communication protocols
- **Emergency Evacuation Policy:** Define roles and responsibilities during evacuations, communication with stakeholders, and reporting procedures to awarding bodies

Online systems



Exams Officers must also be proficient in the use of:

- Awarding body systems and secure websites
- The centre's Management Information System (MIS)

Practical experience

To become truly effective, an Exams Officer should participate in at least one full exam cycle - preferably a summer series involving the entire student cohort. This hands-on experience helps develop the ability to manage and resolve a wide range of exam-related scenarios. Many of these situations are not explicitly covered in regulations and require the Exams Officer to apply both regulatory knowledge and practical judgement to reach satisfactory outcomes.

Beyond mastering the technical aspects of exam administration, Exams Officers must also:

- **Stay informed about cyber security requirements:** This includes completing annual training to protect sensitive exam-related data and systems
- **Understand and enforce question paper security protocols:** Exams Officers must follow strict regulations for receiving, checking, storing, handling, and distributing question papers and other confidential materials to maintain the integrity of the examination process

4. People management

An Exams Officer must manage and/or direct the following staff:

- Invigilators (to conduct examinations/assessments in line with JCQ regulations. This includes recruitment, interviewing, and annual training for new and existing invigilators)
- Reception staff (to receive and record the receipt of confidential exam materials)
- Site staff (to ensure that exam rooms are set up in line with JCQ regulations)

5. Supporting contingency and succession planning

It is the Exams Officer's responsibility to support contingency measures as mandated by JCQ by providing information to their line manager which cover all aspects of examination/assessment administration and delivery. These include providing/listing:

- Information for the member of staff temporarily covering the Exams Officer role of the tasks which need to be completed, how these need be completed and any relevant deadlines
- Succession arrangements to support the arrival of a new Exams Officer upon the permanent departure of the existing Exams Officer

The Exams Officer is responsible for ensuring their line manager is fully informed about contingency arrangements in relation to their role as required by JCQ. These arrangements must cover all aspects of exam and assessment administration and delivery.

Key responsibilities include:

- **Temporary Cover Guidance:** Provide clear instructions for any staff member temporarily taking over the Exams Officer role. This should include:
 - A list of essential tasks
 - Step-by-step guidance on how to complete each task
 - Relevant deadlines and timeframes
- **Succession Planning:** Outline procedures to support the smooth transition to a new Exams Officer in the event of a permanent departure. This includes:
 - Handover documentation
 - Training recommendations
 - Key contacts and system access details

6. Advising and guiding the head of centre and senior leadership team

Due to their in-depth knowledge of JCQ regulations, the Exams Officer is widely regarded within most centres as the leading expert on exam compliance. As a result, the head of centre and senior leadership team regularly seek their advice on maintaining the integrity and security of the examination process.

The Exams Officer's expertise plays a vital role in helping the head of centre fulfil their responsibilities, including:

- Meeting the obligations outlined in the annual [Head of centre declaration](#)
- Ensuring full compliance with JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements
- Protecting the centre from incidents of malpractice and maladministration

7. Managing the results and post-results process

Once results are issued, Exams Officers must be prepared to manage a range of enquiries about results, including requests for:

- **Access to scripts**
- **Clerical re-checks**
- **Reviews of marking**
- **Reviews of moderation**
- **Appeals to awarding bodies**

The volume and nature of these requests can vary widely and are often unpredictable. However, all must be submitted within strict deadlines set by the awarding bodies.

After receiving outcomes from post-results enquiries, Exams Officers must also be prepared to support the submission of formal appeals, if necessary.

This entire process can span several weeks. In centres offering GCSE re-sits, it overlaps with preparation for the November exam series - adding further complexity to the Exams Officer's workload.

8. Stakeholder liaison

Exams Officers play a central role in communication and coordination across a wide range of stakeholders—both within and outside the centre. Few roles, aside from the head of centre and senior leadership team, require such broad and consistent engagement.

Internal stakeholders

Exams Officers are required to collaborate with:

- Head of Centre
- Senior Leadership Team / Line Manager
- Heads of Year
- Heads of Department
- Teaching and Subject Staff
- SENCo and Teaching/Learning Support Assistants
- Finance Team
- Reception Staff
- Site Staff
- Invigilators
- Students
- Parents and Carers

External stakeholders

They also liaise with, or acquire information from, key external organisations, including:

- Department for Education – regarding exam-related policy
- Ofqual – for regulatory compliance
- JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) – for adherence to examination regulations
- Awarding Bodies – for exam administration
- Support and Representative Organisations – such as the National Association of Examinations Officers (NAEO) and The Exams Office

9. Skills

To perform their role effectively, an Exams Officer must develop a broad set of professional skills, including:

- **Time Management:** Organising tasks efficiently to meet tight deadlines
- **People Management:** Leading and supporting staff such as invigilators and liaising with colleagues
- **Contingency Planning and Risk Management:** Preparing for unexpected events and minimising disruption.
- **Task Prioritisation and Multitasking:** Managing a busy workload and handling multiple responsibilities simultaneously
- **Problem Solving:** Responding calmly and effectively to challenges as they arise
- **Communication Skills:** Conveying information clearly to a wide range of stakeholders.
- **Handling Difficult Conversations:** Managing sensitive discussions with professionalism and empathy
- **Presentation Skills:** Delivering training or briefings confidently and clearly
- **Decision Making:** Making informed choices under pressure
- **Deadline Management:** Ensuring all exam-related tasks are completed on time
- **Collaborative Working:** Building strong working relationships across the centre

10. Mandatory training

Exams Officers are required to complete a range of mandatory training activities in line with JCQ regulations. These include:

- **Ongoing Professional Development (CPD)** such as attending an annual update course to stay informed of regulatory changes and best practices
- **Role-specific training and support** to facilitate the effective delivery of examinations and assessments within the centre and ensure full compliance with JCQ and awarding body requirements
- **Annual Cyber Security Training** covering key areas outlined in JCQ regulations to safeguard sensitive exam-related data and systems

Conclusion

The role of the Exams Officer is far more than a routine administrative function - it is a cornerstone of regulatory compliance, operational integrity, and strategic leadership within



every centre. While administrative tasks are part of the role, they demand deep expertise in examination regulations and must be executed with precision under strict timelines.

Centre leaders must ask themselves: does the title “officer” or “manager” truly reflect the scope of responsibility this role entails?

An effective Exams Officer is entrusted with:

1. Overseeing the conduct of examinations and assessments
2. Managing operational and regulatory risk
3. Applying expert knowledge of JCQ and awarding body regulations
4. Leading and coordinating teams
5. Supporting contingency and succession planning
6. Advising senior leadership on compliance and best practice
7. Administering the results and post-results process
8. Liaising with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders
9. Demonstrating a broad skill set across communication, decision-making, and problem-solving
10. Completing mandatory training to uphold standards and security

If there is still ambiguity around the status and recognition of the Exams Officer role, it must be benchmarked against other positions with comparable responsibilities - and elevated accordingly.