

## NAEO Exams article – July 2026

### Initial feedback from the summer 2026 exam series

As the summer examination series has now concluded, we are beginning to review how examinations were managed, administered and conducted over recent weeks.

While further information and analysis will become available over the coming months, initial feedback indicates that the Summer 2026 series was, overall, successful, with no major widespread issues reported. However, this should not detract from the operational challenges that many exams managers and officers experienced and which now need to be addressed.

This initial feedback will be shared with key stakeholders, including the Department for Education (DfE), Ofqual, JCQ and the major awarding bodies.

### Key areas identified

#### Access arrangements

The administration of access arrangements (which includes reasonable adjustments) remains one of the most significant challenges facing exams managers and officers. The continued increase in the number and complexity of access arrangements has placed considerable pressure on staff, particularly as many exams managers/officers work with little or no administrative support.

The significant increase in the awarding of supervised rest breaks has particularly created additional operational difficulties.

The increasing volume of approved access arrangements has resulted in a significant increase in workload, including:

- Arranging and managing a larger number of examination rooms
- Recruiting sufficient invigilators to meet increased one-to-one invigilation requirements
- Training facilitators to act as readers, scribes and other support roles
- Managing multiple finishing times for candidates with supervised rest breaks
- Preparing coloured and enlarged examination papers

#### Question paper deliveries

A significant number of exams managers/officers reported issues with the delivery of confidential question papers by awarding body couriers, including:

- Deliveries taking place outside the centre's published opening hours
- Question paper packages being left unattended in reception or other unsecured areas
- Multiple deliveries resulting in more than three weeks' worth of question papers having to be held in centres, creating pressure on secure storage capacity

#### Parcelforce script collections

Concerns were also raised regarding the collection of completed examination scripts by the Parcelforce Worldwide yellow label service. Reported issues included:

- Collections taking place outside agreed collection windows
- Missed collections, in some cases over several consecutive days
- Drivers failing to scan script packages before leaving the centre
- Owner-drivers arriving without appropriate identification and becoming confrontational when asked to provide it, despite this being a security requirement

### **Centre-assessed marks submission deadlines**

The deadlines for submitting centre-assessed marks and samples of candidates' work for coursework and non-examination assessment (NEA), which fall during the examination series, continues to place significant additional pressure on exams managers/ officers at one of the busiest times of the year.

In many centres, teaching staff understandably work towards the published deadline(s) but are often unaware of the additional administrative workload this creates for exams staff during the examination period.

### **Special consideration**

Three recurring issues were identified in relation to special consideration:

- A significant increase in applications, often driven by limited understanding of the regulations among senior leaders and increased requests from parents/carers
- Inconsistent submission deadlines across awarding bodies (even though a common deadline is published by JCQ)
- The need to submit separate applications to each awarding body, making the process time-consuming and repetitive

There have been suggestions that the Centre Admin Portal (CAP) could be developed into a single inter-board portal for submitting special consideration applications.

### **Other issues**

Exams managers/ officers also highlighted the following concerns:

- Changes to malpractice reporting requirements introduced during the examination series, giving limited time for centres to prepare
- Inconsistent availability of electronic question papers for download before the examination when preparing for candidates with access arrangements, with calls for all awarding bodies to provide a standard 90-minute download window, as currently offered by AQA