Part of
Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus

Department for Education

Guidance
DfE exam support service: autumn 2021 exam fees, venues and invigilators

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1. Overview

This guidance is for:

- school and college exam leaders
- heads of other types of exam centre (including GCSEs, A-levels and vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) centres)
- exams officers and other staff involved in exam delivery
- local authorities, single academy trusts (SAMs) and multi-academy trusts (MATs)

Summary of support available

This section lists the categories centres can claim under and provides a summary of the funding calculation for each category. Further detail is included in this guidance and should be referred to prior to submitting a claim.

Exam fee deficit claim
Autumn exam fees minus summer rebate. As last year, do not claim for this category if your summer exam fee rebates or summer fee reductions exceed or are equal to your autumn exam fees.

Additional venue capacity claim
Cost of autumn additional venue capacity.

Additional invigilators claim
Cost of autumn invigilators minus summer 2021 savings on invigilation.

Additional invigilator training claim
Cost of training new invigilators required to resource autumn 2021 exam series.

In January 2021, government announced it was no longer fair for GCSE, AS, A level and other qualifications to be graded in the same way as in a typical year because, instead, students were due to sit exams have received teacher assessed grades this summer. Students who took these the option to GCSE, A level and some EU level qualifications in summer 2021 will sit exams in autumn 2021 and spring 2022. Students can sit exams if they are not satisfied with their summer teacher assessed grade or if they need an exam result to move onto the next stage of their education.

This guidance is about the DfE exam support service - an extensive support package to support schools, colleges and other centres to deliver and administer autumn exams in the autumn, including exam fees charged by awarding organisations, alternative venues, and invigilation.

This document provides guidance about the service so schools, colleges and other registered exam centres can:

- make reimbursement claims for any deficit created by autumn exam fees (similar to last year, this is after exam fee rebates have been taken into account)
- claim back additional venue capacity costs (for new invigilators required for the autumn exam series) (this fund is not full, if it is not possible to run exams at their own premises without disrupting study)
- claim back additional invigilation costs (exam invigilation costs which exceed the savings made in summer 2021 invigilation)
- claim back invigilation training costs (for new invigilators required for the autumn exam series)

You should also read the guidance on schools and colleges' responsibilities for the autumn exam which includes expectations for paying exam fees.

Schools and colleges may wish to collaborate, for example to book shared venues or to share invigilators. Schools and colleges should make their own arrangements to do this if they wish.

If you have further queries about using the DfE exam support service that are not answered in this guidance, contact us via the ESFA helpdesk.

1.1 Eligibility

This support is available to state-funded exam centres or any centre on behalf of a state-funded centre, for students who are sitting GCSE, AS, A level and other qualifications (referred to as 'autumn exams' in the rest of this guidance:

- GCSE, AS level and A level in autumn 2021
- VTQ exams in autumn 2021
- VTQ exams in spring 2022

These include:

- state-funded schools and academies
- further education, sixth form and tertiary colleges
- independent training providers who deliver publicly funded VTQs
- state-funded adult and community learning providers
- non-state-funded centres where the cost was incurred for a private candidate who is now being entered for a state-funded exam (for example, a private candidate sitting for autumn entry - centres will need to explain how the cost relates to that candidate and not others, and the private candidate entry fee must be applied for each applicable candidate

In the rest of this guidance, the term 'schools and colleges' is used to refer to all types of exam centre as detailed above.

1.2 Exams and assessments in scope

The service and provide support for the following qualifications:

- A and AS levels and GCSEs (with the exception below)
- VTQs and other general qualifications at level 3, level 2 and level 1, where students received a teacher assessed grade in summer 2021 and there is a scheduled assessment opportunity for the qualification in the autumn 2021 or in spring 2022 series

The service will cover any additional venue and invigilation costs required for candidates entering English and maths exams by students who have not achieved a GCSE grade 4 or above in these subjects.

Resit exams take place in November in a normal academic year and schools and colleges will have planned and budgeted for them. Including for entry fees. Schools and colleges should therefore only claim for additional venue and invigilation costs needed this year.

1.3 When to use the service

You should first establish whether you have capacity to accommodate exams using your existing venues and staff before booking additional venues or invigilators. You may also need to consider if you have capacity to run exams in your own premises without disrupting study in year ones could be possible (for example, schools in year multi-academy trust (MAT) or local authority). This should meet the Joint Council for Qualifications' (JCQ) requirements for exam administration (section 3.2 of JCQ's 'Instructions for conducting GCSE examinations' guidance).

The circumstances of each school or college will vary - many will be able to accommodate all exams with their own venues or staff, or through collaboration with other schools or colleges nearby. Others may be able to accommodate some exams within their own sites (especially those who have sixth forms, or who run a GCSE service for some, or all, of the autumn exams, depending on your own circumstances.

1.4 Service availability

The service opens (opens will open later in the year for schools and colleges to make claims. We will publish a date for this in the coming weeks. Schools and colleges can prepare claims in advance by reading this guidance, alongside further guidance on how to make a claim.

The claims process for invigilation and alternative venues will remain open into the spring term 2022 to cover some VTQ assessments taking place at that time that had not been available in the autumn term.

1.5 Making a claim

Where you do not currently receive payments from ESFA, in order to receive payments against any claims will need to provide information about your banking and payments to DfE. You will also need to enter your 8-digit UK provider registration number (UKPRN) and your 6-digit DfE number. If you do not have these, you can find them in information about schools. If you do not have a UKPRN you can complete a UK learning provider (note that this should be prioritised to prevent delays to payments). If your school or college isn't already set up with an DfE DfE or UK HPRN, you will need to do this before you can make a claim. Your school or college is not eligible.

For all types of claim covered in this guidance centres should keep a record of their UKPRN, centre number, candidate number, and the exam number and QI as these may be required when making a claim.

The claims process will open in the autumn term.

You should follow school procurement rules.

We will review claims and may refuse payment or require repayment for any claims that are not in line with the guidance or eligibility criteria. We will publish a summary of payments every month of the expenditure and the related evidence for at least one year.

2. Support for paying exam fees

The DfE exam support service will provide financial support to schools and colleges to cover the cost of exam fees for students who are sitting GCSE, A level and VTQ exams. We this is since any rebate or credit notes they receive for summer 2021 exams and assessments have been taken into account.

2.1 Funding eligibility criteria for exam fees

This applies to fees incurred for entering students in autumn 2021 for Ofqual-regulated GCSe or VTQs or spring 2022 for a VTQ for which they received teacher assessed grades in summer 2021.

You will receive no further payment of any rebates, fee discounts or credit notes on summer exam fees. Your claim will be ineligible if you have received any rebate, credit or fee reduction notes (whether unchanged or reissued and cover the costs of the autumn exams in many cases. Similar to last year, you must use these rebates to cover autumn fees in the first instance. If your additional fees for the autumn exams exceed any rebates or credit notes received for summer 2021 exams, you can claim back the difference.

We will provide funding for any additional fees charged by schools and colleges, including those charged by awarding organisations. We will not fund fees that schools and colleges do charge administrative fees to students who choose to sit an autumn exam. At centres, where private candidates have already paid an administrative fee to sit a summer exam, the school or college can claim back the autumn and would not expect them to be charged a further fee.

For independent schools, fees, including those charged for exams, are a contractual matter. It is at the discretion of independent schools if they choose to charge an administrative fee to students who sit exams in the autumn. We would, however, expect the school or college to be reasonable. If independent schools cannot charge a fee to private candidates and then use the ESFA.

2.2 What you will need to make a funding claim for fees

You need to keep evidence of your autumn fees and summer fee rebates or credit notes received for inspection.

Examples of acceptable evidence include:

- exam fee/entry examples(GCSEs, AS/A levels, VTQs only)
- credit/fee notes issued by awarding organisations, relating to summer 2021exams
- for the period October 2021 to January 2021(assessment or examinery fee invoices issued (or both) by awarding organisations

You need to make sure that you have JCQ guidance on alternative venue arrangements as appropriate guidance for VTQs set by the awarding organisations. This includes ensuring that you make bookings in time to inform them of your alternative venue by the JCQ deadline. This is 3 working days before the first exam in the venue will be conducted or as others may allow from you those in colleges or training providers. Failure to comply with the JCQ Centre Inspection Service by 23 August 2021for AS and A level exams, or 20 September 2021for GCSE exams. You must complete the JCQ Alternative Venue form online using the Centre Admin Portal (CAP). CAP can be accessed via any of the exam boards' secure extranet sites.

2.3 Funding eligibility criteria for booking your own alternative venue

Centres should book their own alternative venues and submit claims to us along with supporting evidence.

Claims for alternative venue costs can include associated set up and cleaning costs required for the venue where necessary. This extends to normal set up and cleaning costs required for the venue, for example, if the venue is a school hall and requires additional cleaning such as screens or booths. The service will not provide funding if you are using your own premises to facilitate exams. Cleaning or set up costs for your own premises is also not covered.

You should submit your claim after exams have taken place because cancellation charges will be incurred if you book and then cancel venues. Only non-refundable cancellation charges would be eligible where local restrictions prevent candidates from taking exams at a venue where payment has already been made and cannot be refunded. In normal circumstances such as the centre subsequently declining it can not refunded. Not in circumstances.

When booking alternative venues, we would expect costs to reflect local rates. We have set out an illustrative table below and we would not generally expect costs to be outside these ranges unless there are exceptional circumstances (for example local restrictions leading to an increase in price for all suppliers). These illustrative costs include cleaning of the venue and are based on candidates being spaced 2 metres apart.

You will need to retain evidence to support your claim, for example by securing a letter of quotes. DfE reserves the right to fund on the basis of the rates shown below if this evidence is not provided.

Venue rates per day outside London

Candidates numbers per venue	Typical rate	Maximum rate
1 to 25	£800	£1000
26 to 50	£750	£1,000
51 to 100	£900	£1,000
101 to 150	£1,000	£2,000

Venue rates per day in London

Candidates numbers per venue	Typical rate	Maximum rate
1 to 25	£750	£900
26 to 50	£1,000	£1,000
51 to 100	£2,000	£3,000
101 to 150	£2,000	£3,000

2.3 What you will need to make a funding claim for alternative venues

You will need to retain evidence to support your claim, for example by securing a range of quotes.

When booking rooms for over 100 candidates, you must get three quotes to confirm value for money and submit these as part of your claim. You will also need to provide an explanation should you not select the lowest quote.

We have set out an illustrative table of costs per venue for 3.2 of this guidance and we would not generally expect costs to fall outside these ranges unless there are exceptional circumstances (for example local restrictions leading to an increase in price for all suppliers). We will not fund costs per venue in a single session for each day that you claim.

If you are held in collaboration with other schools or colleges, then the school or college that made the arrangement and paid for the venue will be able to enter a claim through the DfE exam support service.

Examples of acceptable venue collaborative include:

- final invoices for venue hire
- invoices for cleaning or set up(where necessary)
- quotes for venue costs over DfE's illustrative costs

3. Support for invigilation

The DfE exam support service will provide financial support to schools and colleges to book invigilators for the autumn exams.

In many cases, schools and colleges will already have a pool of invigilators available to use for the autumn exams. In some instances, however, they may not have sufficient invigilators available. Schools and colleges should make local arrangements to book additional invigilators if required.

You will be able to claim back autumn exam invigilation costs which exceed the savings made on summer invigilation.

3.1 Funding eligibility criteria for invigilation costs

You will be able to claim back the deficit if your autumn invigilation costs exceed the amount of money you have saved on invigilation in summer 2021. The saving is based on calculated by comparing to your last normal exam year (for most centres this will be 2019. If you are a new centre, you should use appropriate comparisons for your size of centre.

This applies to GCSE, A level, AS level and VTQs only.

Funding will cover time invigilators spend receiving training on venue-specific arrangements. The cost of invigilator training courses is covered in section 5 of this guidance.

You should not make any changes to the arrangements you have already made for summer invigilation payments as a result of this process.

We would expect you to follow ICQ's instructions for conducting exams or the appropriate awarding organisation's recommendations on the number of invigilators required for each exam, unless you can demonstrate exceptional circumstances, for example those relating to reasonable adjustments or access arrangements.

The service will not provide funding for travel costs.

You should submit your claim after exams have taken place because we will not cover cancellation charges unless you can show there were exceptional circumstances. For example, if you booked and paid for invigilation services for a particular exam series but duties but payment has already been made and cannot be refunded, but not in circumstances such as the centre subsequently deciding it can run exams with fewer invigilators.

3.2 What you'll need to make a funding claim for invigilation

You should keep records of exams administered and you may be asked to provide an explanation if you are claiming for high invigilator to student ratios.

The claim will be calculated by adding summer 2021 and autumn 2021 invigilation costs, less 'usual' invigilation costs from 2019.

Evidence retained should therefore include:

- records of any actual summer 2021 invigilation costs - for example, all payments made to invigilators in relation to COVID-19
- evidence of the centre's usual summer invigilation costs (where applicable) - we would expect this to be costs of invigilation for 2019
- records of autumn 2021 invigilation costs

5. Support for invigilator training

The DfE exam support service will provide financial support to schools and colleges to train invigilators to support the safe and secure delivery of exams.

In many cases, schools and colleges will already have a pool of trained invigilators available to use for the autumn exams. In some instances, however, they may not have sufficient invigilators available. Centres should make local arrangements to book additional invigilators training if required.

5.1 Funding eligibility criteria for invigilator training costs

You will be able to claim back the cost of training any new invigilators for the safe and secure delivery of the autumn 2021 exam series and any new or current invigilator duties in these exams. Funding will be for new invigilators only, not for refreshing or refresher training for existing invigilators. This is because we expect that, in 2021, all qualification bodies being able to invigilate the autumn exams. You will be able to claim for those invigilators who provide invigilation services for the autumn exams and who have not invigilated in 2019 or 2020. We will not fund costs for any new invigilators required at your centre for a 'normal' year, and we do not need to provide evidence of this.

We would expect you to follow JCQ's instructions for conducting exams or the appropriate awarding organisation's recommendations on the number of invigilators required for each exam, unless you can demonstrate exceptional circumstances, for example those relating to reasonable adjustments or access arrangements. The service will not provide funding for travel costs. We would point centres to the wide range of providers of invigilation training courses to ensure they can secure and flexibly, and potentially combine with larger invigilation numbers.

You should keep records of exams administered and you may be asked to provide an explanation if you are claiming for training for high invigilator to student ratios.

When booking invigilator training, we would expect schools and colleges to minimise value for money. For example, The Invigilator Office can provide online training for up to 200 invigilators per centre for a £250 annual membership fee. If you need to spend more than £250 on training, we would expect you to explore if this would be better value, why The Exams Office service (or an equivalent comparable service) would not be appropriate). Schools and colleges should check whether they are already members of The Exams Office as they should then already be eligible to receive this service.

5.2 What you'll need to make a claim for invigilator training

You will need to keep evidence of your expenditure for inspection, including:

- records of autumn 2021 invigilation training costs for training new invigilators (for example, a separate invoice for online training)
- evidence that the new invigilators you have trained have provided invigilation services in your centre during the autumn exams

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