Part of
Education and childcare during coronavirus

Department for Education

Guidance

DfE exam support service: autumn exam fees, sites and invigilators

Updated 7 September 2020

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1. Overview

This guidance is for:

- school and college senior leaders
- heads of other types of exam centre offering GCSEs, A/AS level or vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) exams
- exams officers and other staff involved in exam delivery
- local authorities and multi-academy trusts (MATs)

All exams due to take place in schools and colleges in summer 2020 were cancelled as part of the public health response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Whilst the majority of students have received grades which will enable them to progress, students will have the option to sit GCSE, A level and AS level exams in autumn 2020 and some vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) students will be able to sit their exams in autumn 2020 and spring 2021. Students can sit exams if they are unhappy with their summer grade or if they need an improved result to move onto the next stage of their education. There will also be a small group of students where there was not enough evidence for a grade to be awarded in the summer, and it is particularly important that these students are able to sit exams.

This guidance outlines the DfE exam support service - an extensive support package to help schools and colleges with essential additional costs associated with running exams in the autumn, including exam fees charged by awarding organisations, alternative sites and invigilation.

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

- make reimbursement claims for any deficit between their autumn exam fees and summer savings from exam fee rebates
- use a government approved supplier to book fully funded alternative sites, if it is not possible to run exams on their own premises without disrupting study
- make their own arrangements for alternative sites (subject to the criteria set out in this guidance) and claim back the full cost
- use a government approved supplier to book suitable and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked individuals for invigilator roles
- claim back invigilation costs (for autumn exam invigilation costs which exceed the savings made on summer invigilation)

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

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

1.1 Eligibility

This support is available to all types of schools, colleges and other exam centres who planned to enter pupils for 2020 summer exams and assessments which were cancelled, and as a result will be running the GCSE, A level and AS level and VTQ exams in autumn 2020 and VTQ exams in spring 2021 (referred to as 'autumn exams' in the rest of this guidance). In order to ensure that no student is disadvantaged when sitting autumn exams and assessments, this support will cover all schools, colleges and other centres and not just those in the state-funded sector.

These include:

- state-funded schools
- further education, sixth-form and tertiary colleges
- independent training providers
- independent schools
- adult and community learning providers
- private exam centres

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 will provide support for the following qualifications:

- A and AS levels and GCSEs (with the exception below)
- VTQs and other general qualifications at level 1 / 2, level 2 and level 3, where students received grades in summer 2020 and there is a scheduled assessment opportunity for the qualification in the autumn or spring series - other VTQs, including functional skills, are not in scope

The service will not cover GCSE English and maths exams taken by students who did not achieve a grade 4 or higher 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. The service will cover GCSE English and maths exams for students who achieved a grade 4 or above and wish to try to improve their result.

1.3 When to use the service

You can use the service for some, or all, of the autumn exams, depending on your own circumstances. You may also work collaboratively with other schools and colleges (for example, other schools in your multi-academy trust (MAT) or local authority) to run exams where this meets Joint Council for Qualifications's instructions for conducting examinations or, in the case of VTQs, arrangements specified by the relevant awarding organisation.

You should first establish whether you have capacity to accommodate exams using your existing sites and staff before booking alternative sites or invigilators. You may also want to consider whether collaborative arrangements with other schools and colleges in your area could be possible. The circumstances of each school or college will vary – many will be able to accommodate all exams with their own sites or staff, or through collaboration with other schools or colleges nearby. Others may be able to accommodate some exams within their sites but need support to run larger entry subjects.

The financial support available is the same regardless of whether you use the government approved suppliers to book alternative sites or invigilators, or make your own arrangements. You should therefore make a decision about which option to use based on what is best in the circumstances for your school or college and for students.

1.4 Service availability

You can use the DfE exam support service to book alternative sites and invigilators if required through our government approved suppliers.

The service claims process will open later in the year for schools and colleges to make claims for costs relating to exam fees, invigilators and alternative sites as set out later in this guidance, alongside further guidance on how to make a claim.

The booking service and claims process for invigilation and alternative sites will remain open into the spring term 2021 to cover some VTQ assessments taking place at that time that had not been available in the autumn term.

2. Support for paying exam fees

The DfE exam support service will provide financial support to schools and colleges to ensure that they do not incur a net loss, taking together their autumn fees and any rebates or credit notes they receive for summer 2020 exams and assessments. This will also apply to fees incurred for entering students in autumn 2020 or spring 2021 to sit VTQs for which they received results in summer 2020.

2.1 Funding eligibility criteria for exam fees

You will receive notification of any rebates or credit notes on summer exam fees from your awarding organisation. We anticipate that the rebates or credit notes schools or colleges receive will cover the costs of the autumn exams in many cases. You must use these rebates to cover autumn fees in the first instance. If your additional fees for the autumn exams exceed any summer savings you receive, DfE will provide funding to cover this deficit.

We will not provide funding for any administrative fees charged by schools and colleges, over and above the fees charged by the awarding organisations. We do not expect schools and colleges to charge administrative fees to students who were entered for exams in the summer. Where private candidates have already paid an administrative fee for the summer, we would not expect them to be charged twice.

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. We will review claims and may refuse payment or require repayment for any claims that do not meet the criteria set out in this guidance. You should therefore ensure that you keep records of this expenditure and the related evidence for at least one year.

In order to receive payments against any claim, you 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). If you do not know the UKPRN for your school or college, you can find it on Get information about schools. If you do not have a UKPRN you can register as a UK learning provider. If your school or college isn't already set up with a DfE sign-in or UKPRN, you should set this up in advance of making a claim so that payment is not delayed.

3. Support for alternative exam sites

The DfE exam support service will provide logistical and financial support to schools and colleges to find alternative sites to run the autumn exams where it is not possible to run them on their own sites (or collaboratively) without disruption to study.

You need to make sure that you follow JCQ guidance on alternative site arrangements or appropriate guidance for VTQ assessments set by the awarding organisation. This includes ensuring that you make bookings in time to inform them of your alternative site for exams. For GCSE, AS and A level exams, this means that for any exams that will be conducted at an address other than your school or college's registered address, you will need to notify the JCQ Centre Inspection Service by 18 September 2020 for AS and A level exams, or 16 October 2020 for GCSE exams. You must complete the JCQ Alternative Site form online using the Centre Admin Portal (CAP). CAP can be accessed via any of the exam boards' secure extranet sites.

3.1 Booking alternative sites through an approved supplier

You can use the government's approved venue supplier if you require alternative sites. You can book sites using the online form below and agree arrangements with the supplier. The supplier will book sites and arrange set up of the venue according to the school or college's requirements, including arranging desks and rooms for candidates with reasonable adjustment requirements. It will also arrange cleaning of the venue in line with public health requirements.

For state-funded schools and colleges, sites booked through the government's approved supplier will be fully funded and you should not make a claim. Independent schools and private exam centres will be invoiced by the supplier and you will need to make claims to cover the costs.

How to book alternative exam sites

You can book alternative exam sites using the government's approved venue supplier by completing the online form.

You will need to enter your 8-digit UK provider registration number (UKPRN). If you do not know the UKPRN for your school or college, you can find it on Get information about schools. If you do not have a UKPRN you can register as a UK learning provider and should do this as soon as possible.

You will need the following information to book an alternative exam site:

- name, address and postcode of your school or college
- UKPRN of your school or college
- for GCSE, AS and A levels, exam centre number of your school or college
- name, email address and phone number of the main contact (usually the exams officer) for the school or college
- email address of the main contact's line manager
- details of the exams for which you wish to book alternative sites (including exam name, awarding organisation, specification/qualification number, date and time)
- number of attendees (candidates and invigilators) for each exam
- set-up requirements

Responsibilities of the school or college

Where you use the DfE exam support service to book alternative sites, it is your responsibility to check the venue offered within 24 hours and confirm that it is suitable. You will need to check that it meets JCQ guidelines or those of appropriate awarding organisations for VTQs. You retain responsibility for running the exams, including ensuring that exams operate in the new venue as per JCQ's guidance on conducting exams or appropriate guidance for VTQ assessments set by the awarding organisation. You are also responsible for managing candidates, including on arrival and departure.

For GCSE, AS and A level exams, this means that you will need to:

- ensure the site is suitable and meets JCQ requirements - set up arrangements can be specified on booking the site through the approved supplier
- ensure you follow JCQ guidance on alternative site arrangements and submit the relevant forms to JCQ
- arrange secure transport of exam papers to the alternative site and secure return to the school or college, where they will be collected as usual
- arrange invigilation as per JCQ requirements

The venue will have evacuation and first aid procedures in place, which will be shared with you. You will be responsible for ensuring that invigilators or exams officers brief candidates about evacuation procedures before each exam starts.

Schools and colleges will be responsible for paying any cancellation charges for confirmed bookings cancelled within 2 weeks of the planned exam date. We and our approved supplier will reserve the right to seek repayment for any cancellation fee incurred unless exceptional circumstances are demonstrated.

3.2 Funding eligibility criteria for booking your own alternative site

If you prefer not to use our supplier, you can book your own alternative sites and submit claims to us along with supporting evidence. The claims process will open later in the autumn term. You should follow school procurement rules when making your own arrangements.

You should submit your claim after the exam has taken place because cancellations charges will not be covered unless exceptional circumstances are demonstrated.

Claims for alternative site costs can include associated set up and cleaning costs for the venue where necessary. The service will not provide funding if you are using your own premises to facilitate exams.

When booking 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 fall outside these ranges unless there are exceptional circumstances. These illustrative costs include cleaning of the venue and are based on candidates being spaced 2 metres apart. The lower level of £0 reflects the venue costs incurred in the case where schools are able to use their own facilities. Bookings made through our approved supplier will use the same cost framework.

Where you book your own site and costs are outside of the rates shown, you should provide evidence to support your claim, for example by sourcing a range of quotes. DfE reserves the right to fund on the basis of the rates shown below if this evidence is not provided.

When booking rooms for over 100 candidates, you must get 3 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.

Venue rates per day outside London

Candidate numbers per venue	£ Lower level	£ Typical rate	£ Maximum rate
1 to 15	0	450	650
Up to 30	0	700	1650
31 to 60	0	900	1650
61 to 100	0	2000	2500

Venues rates per day in London

Candidate numbers per venue	£ Lower level	£ Typical rate	£ Maximum rate
1 to 15	0	750	950
Up to 30	0	2000	3000

31 to 60	0	2500	3000
61 to 100	0	2500	3500

3.3 What you will need to make a funding claim for alternative sites

There are a number of different scenarios where you may wish to make a claim for alternative site costs.

State-funded schools or colleges that booked sites through the DfE exam support service approved supplier

Site costs will be covered automatically through the booking process when state-funded schools and colleges book through the service's approved supplier. You should not make a separate claim for costs through the service.

Independent schools and colleges or private exam centres that booked venues through the DfE exam support service approved supplier

You will be invoiced by the supplier for the cost of the site booking. You can then claim back the booking cost from the DfE exam support service.

Schools and colleges that did not use the DfE exam support service approved supplier and made their own arrangements

If you made local arrangements to book sites, either acting individually or in collaboration with other schools or colleges, then the school or college that made the arrangement and paid for the site will be able to enter a claim through the DfE exam support service.

In order to receive payments against any claim, you 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). If you do not know the UKPRN for your school or college, you can find it on Get information about schools. If you do not have a UKPRN you can register as a UK learning provider. If your school or college isn't already set up with a DfE sign-in or UKPRN, you should set this up in advance of making a claim so that payment is not delayed.

You will need to keep evidence of your expenditure for inspection, including invoices, along with evidence of seeking value for money, for example through a range of quotes. We will review claims and may refuse payment or require repayment for any claims that do not meet the criteria set out in this guidance. You should therefore ensure that you keep records of this expenditure and the related evidence for at least one year.

4. Support for invigilation

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

You can use the DfE exam support service to book Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked individuals who are suitable for the invigilator role through an approved supplier. Alternatively, if you require additional invigilators, you can make local arrangements to book invigilators. You should follow procurement rules when making your own arrangements.

For either type of booking, you will be able to claim back invigilation costs for autumn exam invigilation costs which exceed the savings made on summer invigilation. The process for making claims is set out later in this guidance.

4.1 Booking invigilators through an approved supplier

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. Where you do not have sufficient invigilators, you can use the DfE exam support service to book additional DBS checked individuals. Your school or college will be invoiced for the cost of this directly by the supplier.

How to book invigilators

You can book DBS checked individuals through an approved supplier by completing the online form.

You will need to enter your 8-digit UK Provider Registration Number (UKPRN). If you do not know the UKPRN for your centre, you can find it on Get information about schools. If you do not have a UKPRN you can register as a UK learning provider and should do this as soon as possible.

In order to complete the form to book DBS checked individuals for invigilation, you will need the following information:

- name, address and postcode of your school or college
- UKPRN of your school or college
- name, email address and phone number of the main contact (usually the exams officer) for the school or college
- dates and times you wish to book invigilation for (this should include time for both invigilator training and the exams)
- number of DBS checked individuals required
- address that DBS checked individuals will need to attend for exams or training

Responsibilities of the school or college

If you use the DfE exam support service to book DBS-checked individuals, you still retain responsibility to ensure that exams operate in line with JCQ's instructions for conducting exams or appropriate guidance for VTQs set by the awarding organisation as usual. This means that you will need to ensure that invigilators have received suitable training and are briefed on how to run the exams.

You will need to consider how and when to deliver training to the DBS-checked individuals that you book through the approved supplier. You should allow sufficient time to arrange training in advance of exams taking place when making your booking.

Please refer to JCQ's instructions for conducting exams for information about the roles and responsibilities of invigilators, the ratios of invigilators to candidates and the training requirements for invigilators. For those VTQs in scope, please refer to the guidance issued by the awarding organisation you are working with.

4.2 Funding eligibility criteria for invigilation costs

Most schools and colleges will have made savings on invigilation costs, following the cancellation of summer exams. Whether you book through our preferred supplier or make your own arrangements for invigilators, you will be able to claim back the deficit if your autumn invigilation costs exceed your summer invigilation savings, following the cancellation of exams and assessments - this includes training time. You should not make any changes to the arrangements you have already made for summer invigilator payments as a result of this guidance.

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. We would expect you to follow JCQ's instructions for conducting exams or appropriate awarding organisation 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 the exam has taken place because we will not cover cancellation charges unless you can show there were exceptional circumstances.

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

You can claim to cover the costs of invigilation for the autumn exams from the DfE exam support service if your autumn invigilation fees exceed invigilation savings you have made in the summer, following the cancellation of exams and assessments.

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

- records of actual summer 2020 invigilation costs - for example, any payments made to invigilation in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19)

- evidence of the school or college's usual summer invigilation costs, including any training costs - we would expect this to be costs of invigilation for 2019
- records of autumn 2020 invigilation costs, including any training costs

In order to receive payments against any claim, you 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). If you do not know the UKPRN for your school or college, you can find it on Get information about schools. If you do not have a UKPRN you can register as a UK learning provider. If your school or college isn't already set up with a DfE sign-in or UKPRN, you should set this up in advance of making a claim so that payment is not delayed.

DfE will review claims and may refuse payment or require repayment for any claims that do not meet the criteria set out in this guidance. You should therefore ensure that you keep records of this expenditure and the related evidence for at least a year.

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