

Part of **Education and childcare during coronavirus**



Department for Education

Guidance

Public health arrangements for autumn exams

Updated 18 September 2020

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This guidance is for:

- school and college senior leaders
- heads of other types of exam centre offering GCSEs, A levels, AS levels or vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) exams in autumn 2020
- exams officers and other staff involved in exam delivery
- local authorities and multi-academy trusts (MATs)

It applies to all types of exam centre, including:

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

The term 'schools and colleges' in this guidance is used to refer to all types of exam centre.

This guidance:

- applies specifically to the conduct of exams in October and November 2020
- supplements and clarifies other existing guidance

This guidance sets out public health arrangements that schools, colleges and other exam centres should implement when delivering exams in autumn 2020 to enable them to progress in a coronavirus (COVID-19) secure way. You should read this alongside our [guidance on schools and colleges' responsibilities for the autumn exams](#).

Schools, colleges and other exam centres should also follow the public health advice in the:

- [guidance for full opening for schools](#)
- [further education \(FE\) autumn term guidance](#)
- [guidance for full opening for special schools and other specialist settings](#)
- [safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#)

Schools, colleges and other centres should also follow the [Instructions for Conducting Examinations](#) published on the Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ) website for GCSE, AS and A level exams. In the case of VTQ exams, you should follow the guidance specified by the relevant awarding organisation.

Engagement with NHS Test and Trace

You must make sure that you understand the NHS Test and Trace process and that you've read the guidance on [how schools should respond to any infections](#).

Your school or college will need to collect and keep contact information for candidates and invigilators so that you can share it with NHS Test and Trace if needed. This is particularly important for any external visitors, including any non-school staff assisting with exams, and candidates not on roll at the school or college. Every exam will have a seating plan, so you can add the names of the invigilators and cross reference them to the contact details you hold for candidates and invigilators.

Arrival and departure of candidates

As candidates arrive before the scheduled start time of exams, you will need to keep them separate from other students arriving at the school or college.

You should identify a location where candidates will wait before the exam that can support social distancing between group 'bubbles' as well as between on-roll and off-roll candidates.

You should also make sure that any candidates who arrive late for the exam follow social distancing measures.

You will need to make sure that there is a plan to manage candidates leaving the exam room and site, particularly as exams may finish at different times. As part of this, you will need to take into account any candidates who need extra time in exams.

These considerations apply wherever the exams are taking place - whether in a school, college, private exam centre or another venue booked specifically for the purpose of taking exams. Where alternative locations are used to run exams, you will still need to manage the arrival and departure of candidates to make sure they maintain social distancing as they wait for exams, including from other members of the public who may be present in entry lobbies and so on.

Cleaning

Exam rooms should be kept clean. Frequently touched surfaces (door handles, individual desks and so on) should be cleaned after every exam with the usual cleaning products, including the backs of chairs where candidates may pull chairs out to sit.

Rooms do not need to be left empty between exams, provided they are cleaned properly each time.

The [guidance for cleaning non-healthcare settings](#) sets out advice on general cleaning and on cleaning settings when there has been a suspected case of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Set up of the exam room

Desks should not be set up face to face. For GCSE, AS and A level exams, the minimum distance in all directions from centre to centre of candidates' chairs must be 1.25 metres, following JCQ's [Instructions for Conducting Examinations](#). This distance is the minimum that must be maintained for students within a group bubble. For VTQ exams, you should follow the guidance specified by the relevant awarding organisation.

All other candidates, whether in different group bubbles, private candidates or those returning to school or college to take exams, should be seated 2 metres apart from each other. These candidates can be seated in the same room.

There is no overall limit on the number of candidates who can sit in a room, as long as desks are correctly spaced. The upper limit to the number of candidates who can take an exam in a room together depends on the desk spacing requirements.

Good ventilation is important and you should maximise this wherever possible, for example opening windows and propping open doors (not fire doors) where safe to do so (bearing in mind safeguarding in particular). For more advice, read the Health and Safety Executive [guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

Invigilators may walk up and down aisles between desks, but there must also be points in the room where an invigilator can stand at least 2 metres from the nearest desks and see all the candidates in the room.

Face coverings

Candidates and invigilators do not need to wear face coverings during exams, but they may wear them if they wish to.

Candidates and invigilators should wear face coverings in communal areas if the exam centre is in an area of local intervention, or if you have chosen to use face coverings in communal areas.

For more information, read the guidance on [face coverings in education](#).

Everyone who uses public transport to travel to exams should follow the requirements for wearing face coverings.

Invigilators

Your school or college will have protocols in place for visitors and temporary staff. Invigilators can move between different schools and colleges. They should minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff. Further guidance about supply and peripatetic staff is in our guidance on [school workforce during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Before the exams, you will need to tell invigilators what they need to do to minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff.

Invigilators do not need to wear gloves when collecting exam scripts from candidates.

Maintaining distance between staff and candidates

You should advise invigilators and other staff to stand alongside candidates when interacting with them, rather than face to face.

For encounters of over 15 minutes, for example when scribes, readers or other individuals are supporting candidates, staff should maintain a 2 metre distance where possible, for example using a separate room from other candidates. If staff cannot maintain a 2 metre distance, they should avoid close face to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of others. These arrangements may not be possible when working with some candidates who have complex needs, in which case these candidates' educational support should be provided as normal during exams.

If candidates need to leave the exam room and need to be accompanied for more than 15 minutes, staff should maintain a 2 metre distance where possible. If this is not possible, staff should take mitigating measures, such as standing alongside the candidate and considering using a face covering.

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