Part of
Education and childcare during coronavirus

Guidance
Pupil health guidance to support autumn exams

Updated 29 September 2020

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Updates to this guidance include:

- setting out our expectation that schools and colleges will run autumn series exams, including where the school or college is only open for smaller student groups
- our expectation that schools and colleges in areas of local restrictions will run exams
- explaining that candidates who have taken the minimum necessary assessments for their subject in the autumn series can apply for 'special consideration' and still be awarded a grade, even if they are not able to sit all the exams
- advising schools and colleges of the need to continue to provide reasonable adjustments to support candidates with special educational needs and disabilities during the exam series

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 qualifications (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 arrangements that schools, colleges and other exam centres should put in place to support students who are in autumn 2020 to enable them to progress in a way which significantly reduces the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19). You should read this alongside:

- guidance on schools and colleges' responsibilities for the autumn exams
- guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infections

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

- actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak
- 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.

The CPD exam support service can be contacted to source alternative sites if needed, or schools and colleges can make their own venue arrangements and claim back.

Autumn exam contingencies

When exams will run and the impact of local restrictions

The autumn exam series begins in October. AS and A levels exams start on Monday 5 October and finish on Friday 23 October. GCSE exams start on Monday 2 November and finish on Thursday 19 November. In some areas of England exams will be running over autumn half term, as acknowledged in Ofqual's consultation on the autumn exam series.

It is our expectation that schools and colleges will run autumn series exams, including where the school or college is only open for smaller student groups, where the local restrictions and collating evidence in areas under local restrictions to run exams. Where candidates are travelling to or within an area under local restrictions to take exams, they should refer to the travel guidance.
Candidates should expect to be able to travel for the purpose of taking exams.

Alternative sites

Some schools and colleges can book alternative sites, sometimes at short notice, so that exams can run. The CPD exam support service can be contacted to source alternative sites if needed. Schools and colleges in areas under local restrictions could contact the JCQ's online alternative site arrangements form for GCSE, AS or A levels, or notify the appropriate awarding organisation for other qualifications, as soon as possible. This may be done, where necessary, the day before the exam, or in exceptional circumstances, on the day of the exam. JCQ guidance on alternative sites sets out how this should be done.

Even in areas of local restrictions, we anticipate that alternative sites will be available for exams to take place. However, schools and colleges in areas under local restrictions may necessitate closure or restriction of a site at the last minute. In the unlikely event that this takes place, schools and colleges can contact the CPD exam support service to seek an additional venue.

Candidates who miss exams in the autumn series

As in previous years, provided candidates have taken the minimum necessary assessments for their subject in the autumn series, their school or college can apply for 'special consideration' to be awarded if they are unable to attend the minimum assessments for valid reasons. This applies to all scenarios we have mentioned.

The minimum necessary assessments needed for special consideration to apply vary by qualification. For GCSE, AS and A levels, provided candidates have completed a minimum of 25% of the assessments in the subject, they will be awarded a grade if their application for special consideration is accepted.

GCSE, AS and A level exams in the autumn series cannot be rescheduled.

It is possible that some candidates will, very unfortunately, be unable to attend the minimum number of exams. In this case, the minimum necessary assessments and therefore cannot be awarded a grade in the autumn series will have the option to enter exams in summer 2021.

Preparing for and running autumn exams

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 for schools (should contain links to get 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. Your school or college should make it clear to all staff, students and the invigilators and cross-reference them to the contact details you hold for candidates and invigilators.

Arrival and departure of candidates

Candidates should meet the safer travel guidance before planning their journey to their exam, especially where the exam is being held in a location to which the candidate does not normally travel.

As candidates arrive before the scheduled start time of exams, you will need to keep them separate from other candidates 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 school, college, private exam centre or another venue booked specifically for the purpose of taking exams. Where alternative locations are used for exams, you will still need to manage the arrival and departure of candidates to make sure that social distancing and hygiene are in place. Where exams are taken in other venues, you will need to work with the venue, the Health and Safety Executive guidance or an employee risk assessment to ensure the coronavirus (COVID-19) risk is managed.

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.

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 social distance as possible from other staff.

Invigilators do not need to wear gloves when collecting exam scripts from candidates but should wash their hands thoroughly and more frequently than usual and particularly after handling exam papers.

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 support staff are supporting candidates with special educational needs, you should where possible, for example using separate rooms 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 and who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) who would be harmed by social distancing.

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 minimise contact as much as is practicable alongside the candidate and considering using a face covering.

Candidate health

The guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infections applies throughout.

School and college action

Schools and colleges must take swift action when they become aware that a candidate present for the autumn series exams has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19). They must follow the guidance outlined in actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak. This guidance sets out the expectation that schools and colleges can contact the dedicated advice service introduced by Public Health England (PHE) and delivered by the NHS Business Services Authority. This can be reached by calling the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 and selecting option 1 for advice on the test to stay process in a positive case.

Candidates with symptoms

Any candidate with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) must stay at home for 10 days from the onset of symptoms and must not leave their homes. The most important symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are the recent onset of either:

- new continuous cough
- high temperature
- loss of or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

Candidates should stay at home and arrange to have a test if they have coronavirus (COVID-19).

Candidates will be unable to take exams during their period of isolation. If the candidate is not tested for coronavirus (COVID-19), they must isolate for 10 days from the onset of symptoms.

Where candidates are isolating in line with public health advice

Where a member of the candidate's household is symptomatic, the candidate must isolate for 14 days from the start of their household member's symptoms. They cannot take exams during that period. This also applies if the candidate is asked to isolate following contact with someone with the virus. Candidates cannot take exams during their period of isolation.

Candidates in quarantine following certain foreign travel restrictions will miss exams during their period of quarantine. See guidance on travel corridors for an up to date list of countries where quarantine is not required in England.

Where a candidate has a negative test

Candidates should follow guidance about their coronavirus (COVID-19) test result when they receive it. The guidance sets out the circumstances where candidates do not need to self-isolate. They can attend exams in these circumstances.

Candidates who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus (COVID-19)

Candidates who are clinically extremely vulnerable should refer to the shielding guidance.

Reasonable adjustments

Schools and colleges must, under their Equality Act obligations, continue to make reasonable adjustments for candidates with special educational needs and disabilities.

JCQ, on behalf of its exam board members, publishes extensive guidance about how schools and colleges can support candidates with special educational needs and disabilities. Schools and colleges should continue to follow this, as their GCSE, AS or A level exams. JCQ has published supplementary guidance on how to cover the autumn 2020 exam series.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) will need to ensure they are well-rooted screened into the end of the autumn exam series. Timescales have been published for reasonable adjustment applications for those candidates whose circumstances have changed or new needs have arisen.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) will need to ensure that the access arrangement is still appropriate, practicable and reasonable.

In the extent of a candidate's circumstances changing, the SENCo may (where required) need to produce evidence and processes an online application.

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