



Examinations Policy

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1. Background/Introduction

Belfast Met is committed to ensuring that the exams management and associated administration process is run effectively, efficiently and in compliance with Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) published regulations and the requirements of the various awarding bodies and exam boards.

The College works with over 30 awarding organisations and the examination service plays a key role liaising with them for student registrations, awarding and certification.

Under Article 8g of the Belfast Metropolitan College's Articles for Governance the Principal and Chief Executive of Belfast Met is primarily responsible for the admission, assessment and examination of students. This policy sets out how the Principal and Chief Executive meets this obligation.

2. Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that:

- All aspects of the College's exam process are documented, supporting the exams contingency plan and other relevant exams-related policies, procedures and plans.
- Exam staff are well informed and supported.
- All College staff involved in the exams process clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and are trained for their various roles.
- All exams and assessments are conducted according to JCQ regulations and those of the awarding bodies via their guidance and instructions, therefore always maintaining the integrity and security of exams.
- Exam candidates understand the exams process and what is expected of them.
- The centre will prevent, identify and report malpractice.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all staff involved in the planning, organisation and management of examinations to ensure they are conducted efficiently, in a timely manner and in the best interest of learners whilst maintaining security of all examination resources and compliance with awarding body or organisation regulations.

The policy encompasses all examinations conducted by Belfast Met under controlled conditions to include all awarding bodies, University Partners and Professional Bodies.

3 Policy Details

3.1 Qualifications Offered

Belfast Met offers a wide range of qualification types which can be academic, vocational or skills related.

Qualifications are grouped together into different levels. The levels are contained within the **Regulated Qualifications Framework [RQF]**. There are nine levels in the framework from entry level [which is sub-divided into 3] to level 8.

Higher education qualifications are contained in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications [FHEQ]. The FHEQ corresponds with levels 4 to 8 of the RQF.

RQF		FHEQ	Example Qualification
8			Doctoral Degree
7			Master's Degree
6			Bachelor's degree with honours
			Non-honours bachelor's degree
5			Higher National Diploma
4			Higher National Certificate
3		n/a	A-Level, National Diploma
2			GCSE [grades A*-C*] [9-4]
1			GCSE [grades D-G] [3-1]
Entry	E3		Skills for Life/Essential Skills
	E2		
	E1		

3.2 Exam Series, On-Demand Exams and Timetables

An Exam series is the period or session when a whole series of exams take place. Each series has a specific code, base data files, entries and results closing dates.

On Demand exams have no exam periods or sessions and can be booked at any time within the academic year but an appropriate period must be given to examinations services. e.g.

ESOL Skills for Life	Agreed schedule with CAM/Examinations Services
Essential Skills	
Evolve	A minimum of 2 weeks before exam date
NIPS	
Active IQ	

3.3 Registrations

Examinations Services are responsible for the payment of the registration and examination fees. Students must pay any resit, late or very late fees. Examination/registration fee will vary dependent on the Awarding Organisation.

Any fees that are incurred through the failure of curriculum areas to provide the relevant information to Examination Services will be recouped via journal transfer from the relevant curriculum areas.

An Examination/Registration Link Creation Form will be issued to all staff by Examinations Services. Completed Examination/Registration Link Creation Forms should be returned to Examinations Services by the relevant CAM or BSU by the specified deadline. Examinations Services will process the information provided and 'link' the subject code on EBS.

For A levels, GCSEs and Essential Skills entries only:

- Examinations Services will issue a Student Exam Entry Template to the relevant CAM to capture all exam entries to be processed. Essential Skills registrations will be captured from EBS.
- Exam entry lists for Essential Skills should be forwarded to the relevant campus Exams Officer by the appropriate date. All other entries will be captured directly from EBS provided the students are fully enrolled, e.g., course fees have been paid (as appropriate).
- Tutors should check Student Exam Entry templates and return checked forms to Examinations Services.
- Examinations Services will register students with the relevant Awarding Body by the specified deadline. Once exam entries have been submitted to the Awarding Body, Examinations Services will send relevant tutors an Exam Entry Confirmation Report to confirm the right students have been entered for the correct exam.
- Tutors must notify Examinations Services if any students are to be added or withdrawn, or if any details are to be amended. Examinations Services will update entries as appropriate. For some Awarding Bodies the arrangements will differ. For example, for Pearson programmes, tutors can withdraw or delete a student via Edexcel Online (EOL) but must inform Examinations Services that they have done this. Pearson will only refund registration fees to the College for deletions processed by 31st December each year.

Please note that tutors should also:

- Be aware of Awarding Body expiry dates for a learner registration, e.g., each Pearson registration lasts five years or until the qualification expires.
- Be aware of the approval expiry date for the qualification being delivered.

Qualification Top Ups and Drop Downs

Tutors should contact their campus Exams Officer if they need to top up or drop down a qualification. They must do this before they record their unit outcomes on the relevant Awarding Body portal.

3.4 Results and Certification

The process for claiming certification differs between Awarding Bodies. A summary of the main processes is provided below.

Accuracy Checks

In all cases, steps should be taken by relevant Curriculum Teams to ensure the accuracy of any claim for certification, including:

- Verification of candidate identity;
- Accuracy of candidate registration;
- Accuracy of certification claim (e.g., match of outcomes/grades against IV/SV/EE/EQA judgements/Exam Board grades);
- Accuracy of direct claims for certification; and,
- Return of certificates where an outcome has changed.

Examinations Services will process the information provided by curriculum staff. Checks for accuracy (as listed above) are the responsibility of the relevant Curriculum Team.

Contact your campus Exams Officer if you have any queries about certification for your programmes.

Automatic Results and Certificates

Some Awarding Bodies automatically generate results and certificates. These include results and certificates for A levels, GCSEs and some Essential Skills qualifications.

Claim Forms for Certification

For some qualifications a Certificate Claim Form (or other similar Awarding Body Form) is required. These include NCFE, OCN, ILM, Active IQ and some City and Guilds qualifications. Examinations Services will issue a Claim Form following registration of candidates with the Awarding Body. This form should be used for recording and verification of results by IV and EV. The completed Claim Form should be returned by the IV to Examinations Services for upload of results and to claim for certificates.

Results and Certificates for Other Qualifications

Arrangements for the main Awarding Bodies and qualifications dealt with by the College are shown below. Tutors should contact their Exams Officer if they have a query about results and certificates for a qualification or Awarding Body not listed below.

- **Pearson BTEC-** Tutors (or coordinators as appropriate) record students results in the bulk reporting spreadsheet and submit to exams. If a tutor has submitted an incorrect outcome, they must complete a SA16 Form to correct this. If a certificate has been issued prior to the error in outcomes submitted being identified, the incorrect certificate must be retrieved and returned to Pearson via your Exams Officer.
- **Results and Certificates to Students-** Unit and full award results for BTEC qualifications which have externally assessed units (e.g. exams or set tasks) are issued to students by Examinations Services on the specified JCQ Results Days. Examinations Services will also post certificates to students when received from Pearson. Unit and full award results for BTEC qualifications which have internally assessed units only are issued to students by curriculum staff. Examinations Services will post certificates to students when received from Pearson.
- **City and Guilds** - Examinations Services will issue an 'S Form' to tutors for certification claims. This should be completed and returned to the relevant Exams Office.
Results and Certificates to Students- Examinations Services will post certificates to students when received from City and Guilds.
- **City and Guilds Technicals** - Where students have taken an externally assessed unit, results will be issued by Examinations Services on the specified JCQ Results Days. **Results and Certificates to Students-** Examinations Services will also post certificates to students when received from City and Guilds.
- **OCR and OCR Cambridge Technicals-** Unit and full award results for OCR Technical qualifications which have externally assessed units (e.g. exams or set tasks) are issued to students by Examinations Services on the specified JCQ Results Days. Examinations Services will also post certificates to students when received from OCR. Unit and overall award results for OCR qualifications which have internally assessed units only are issued to students by curriculum staff.
Results and Certificates to Students-Examinations Services will post certificates to students when received from OCR.
- **CACHE-** Examinations Services will issue a form to tutors for certification claims. This should be completed and returned to the relevant Exams Office.

Results and Certificates to Students Examinations Services will post certificates to students when received from CACHE.

- **Ulster University (UU)**- Tutors send course results directly to UU who will send certificates directly to Examinations Services. Examinations Services will forward certificates to the relevant Curriculum Department.

Results and Certificates to Students -The relevant Curriculum Department should arrange for collection of certificates by individual students.

4.5 Examinations Access Arrangements

Legislative Context

Equality legislation requires educational institutions to make reasonable adjustments where a candidate who is disabled would be at a substantial disadvantage in undertaking an assessment.

The Disability Discrimination Act defines disability as *“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day- to-day activities”*. A reasonable adjustment for a particular candidate is unique to that individual based on the barriers that their disability presents them with.

Access Arrangements at Belfast Met

Access arrangements are the adjustments made for students based on evidence of need and normal way of working at the College. Whether an adjustment is considered reasonable will depend on a number of factors which include:

- the effectiveness of the adjustment;
- the financial impact of the adjustment; and/or
- the impact on all candidates.

An adjustment can be declined if it is not considered as ‘reasonable’, e.g., too costly. The security or integrity of an assessment must not be compromised by an adjustment. In addition, the adjustment must not constitute examination malpractice. The range of access arrangements for examinations can include:

- supervised rest breaks;
- smaller group invigilation;
- extra time;
- reader;
- scribe;

- assistive software/technology;
- prompter;
- use of a word processor;
- modified papers;
- ergonomic furniture;
- practical assistant.

Applications for Access Arrangements

Examinations Services will process the applications for access arrangements where necessary, including requests for non-JCQ courses such as Active IQ, NEBDN, CIPS and Cambridge English Assessment. For more information, please contact the relevant campus Exams Office in sufficient time before the entry closure dates.

Deadlines

Applications for Access Arrangements, along with accompanying evidence, must be received and processed by Examinations Services by the deadlines set out on an annual basis. These deadlines will allow the Centre for Inclusive Learning and Examinations Services the time necessary to make provision for access arrangements.

Referrals to Inclusive Learning for access arrangements for examinations will not be processed after the specified deadline date unless extenuating circumstances exist. However, referrals for curriculum support arrangements will still be accepted.

External Scrutiny

The processes around access arrangements for exams are subject to scrutiny from Regulatory and/or Awarding Bodies such as JCQ who will carry out centre inspections to see appropriate documentation to substantiate the use of an access arrangement.

It should be noted that:

- late applications for access arrangements are subject to considerable scrutiny by JCQ; and
- the College SENCo [or equivalent] should be available to present documentation to the JCQ Centre Inspector. "If the SENCo is not available, the relevant member of the senior leadership team must meet with the Inspector and address any queries, any questions, he/she may raise"¹(JCQ, 2023).

Implementation of Access Arrangements

Following approval of a request for access arrangements for exams by the relevant Awarding Organisation, Examination Services will inform the students that their application for access arrangements has been approved.

Examination Services will then ensure the implementation and recording of the approved access arrangements as appropriate.

4.6 Invigilation

The invigilator is the appointed person in the examination room that has responsibility for the conduct during the examination session. They play a vital role in the integrity of the examination process and are appointed by the examination service within the College.

The Examination Service works in conjunction with the College's Human Resources Department to secure the appointment of Invigilators to the Invigilator Register.

Once appointed, Invigilators are fully trained by Examinations Services following JCQ guidance. Examinations Services is responsible for booking of Invigilators and the rooms for end assessments.

Belfast Met is responsible to ensure that there is no conflict of interest for the invigilators appointed to supervise an exam and that they have not been involved in the preparation of students for an exam that they are invigilating.

There must be an appropriate ratio of invigilators with a minimum of 1 for each group of 30 learners. When there is only one invigilator, they must have a method to be able to contact the examinations team to request assistance.

The invigilator will be provided with an invigilation pack prior to the start of each examination and includes a copy of the JCQ-ICE instructions and specific guidance that will relate to the Awarding body requirements and the examination which they are invigilating. The invigilator will read this guidance to the candidates and make them aware of what can and cannot be done or brought into the exam room.

During the examination the Invigilator must focus on their role and not on other tasks. They must be vigilant to all that is going on in their room and inform the examination team of anything suspicious in the exam room.

4.7 Receipt and Storage of Exam Papers

The Examinations Team are responsible for the secure storage of examination papers in advance of an exam and after completion. Not all qualifications fall under JCQ but for best practice we apply JCQ guidance for all within the College.

The following JCQ guidance must be followed:

- 1.1 "The following instructions apply to all confidential materials to ensure the integrity and security of the examinations. This includes question papers in any format.

1.2 Awarding bodies must be informed immediately if the security of the question papers or confidential supporting instructions is put at risk. This includes any natural disaster, fire, theft, loss, damage or other circumstance which places the existing accommodation or secure storage of examination materials at risk.

1.3 Centres must be able to demonstrate the receipt, secure movement and secure storage of question papers and confidential materials.

1.4 Centres must ensure that envelopes and boxes containing confidential materials are signed for. A log must be kept at the initial point of delivery of confidential materials. Each awarding body's deliveries and the number of boxes received must be logged. The JCQ has produced Materials Receipt Logs for centres to use for this purpose. These can be found at: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/ice---instructions-for-conducting-examinations/>

1.5 The Head of Centre must ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place so that confidential examination materials are only handed over to authorised members of staff. Care must always be taken to ensure the security of materials.

1.6 On receipt, the question paper packets, still in their dispatch packaging, must be moved immediately to the secure room for checking and transfer to the centre's secure storage facility. It is for the head of centre to set out the appropriate terms of authorisation for members of centre staff.

1.7 Only persons authorised by the Head of Centre and the Exams Officer must be allowed access to the centre's secure storage facility.

1.8 Examination materials must only be accessed in accordance with the awarding body's specific instructions. "

4.8 Malpractice and Maladministration

What is Malpractice/Maladministration?

JCQ defines Malpractice as: "Any act, default or practice which is:

- a breach of the Regulations; and/or
- a breach of awarding body requirements regarding how a qualification should be delivered; and/or
- a failure to follow established procedures in relation to a qualification; which:
 - gives rise to prejudice to candidates; and/or
 - compromises public confidence in qualifications; and/or
 - compromises, attempts to compromise or may compromise the process of assessment, the integrity of any qualification or the validity of a result or certificate; and/or
 - damages the authority, reputation or credibility of any awarding body or centre or

any officer, employee or agent of any awarding body or centre.”

Malpractice in examinations is the deliberate and illegal act contrary to the rules and regulations of the official examinations.

It can take many forms and can include unauthorised possession and/or use of materials, notes or devices during an examination. Types of malpractice can include:

- Candidate
- Centre
- Teacher

The purpose of this is to ensure that all staff involved in examinations are able to identify what Malpractice is and the process to be followed if Malpractice is suspected.

The Malpractice process applies to all qualifications delivered in Belfast Met.

The College takes the necessary steps to try to reduce the chance of malpractice by providing appropriate training and support for all staff involved in delivery of qualifications.

How are candidates informed and advised to avoid committing malpractice in exams/assessments?

It is the responsibility of teaching staff that candidates are informed and advised to avoid committing malpractice in examinations/assessments at the start of courses.

The Examination Service has a dedicated section on the VLE for students in order to share guidance and information. The guidance on *Preventing Malpractice in Examinations and assessments: Guidance for Candidates* is shared with all candidates: [Preventing Malpractice in Examinations and Assessments: Guidance for Candidates 4.pdf \(ccea.org.uk\)](https://www.ccea.org.uk/resources/Preventing_Malpractice_in_Examinations_and_Assessments_Guidance_for_Candidates_4.pdf)

How is suspected malpractice escalated within the centre?

Once suspected malpractice is identified, any member of staff at the centre can report it using the appropriate channels. If you witness or suspect malpractice you must report it to your Examinations Manager who will escalate this to the Head of Centre, who has a duty to investigate and report to the Awarding Organisation.

The Head of Centre will notify the appropriate awarding body immediately of all alleged, suspected or actual incidents of malpractice, using the appropriate forms, and will conduct any investigation and gathering of information in accordance with the requirements of the JCQ publication Suspected Malpractice: Policies and Procedures:

<https://www.icq.org.uk/knowledge-hub/suspected-malpractice-policies-and->

procedures/

If, in the view of the investigator, there is sufficient evidence to implicate an individual in malpractice, that individual (a candidate or a member of staff) will be informed of the rights of accused individuals.

Once the information gathering has concluded, the Head of Centre (or other appointed information-gatherer) will submit a written report summarising the information obtained and actions taken to the relevant awarding body, accompanied by the information obtained during the course of their enquiries.

The appropriate paperwork will be completed and submitted to the awarding organisation.

The awarding body will decide on the basis of the report, and any supporting documentation, whether there is evidence of malpractice and if any further investigation is required. The Head of Centre will be informed accordingly.

Communicating malpractice decisions

Once a decision has been made, it will be communicated in writing to the Head of Centre as soon as possible.

The Head of Centre will communicate the decision to the individuals concerned and pass on details of any sanctions and action in cases where this is indicated.

The Head of Centre will also inform the individuals if they have the right to appeal.

Appeals against decisions made in cases of malpractice

Belfast Met will provide the individual with information on the process and timeframe for submitting an appeal, where relevant.

4.9 Conflict of Interest

It is the responsibility of the Head of Centre to ensure that their centre manages conflicts of interest by informing the awarding bodies, before the published deadline for entries for each examination series, of:

- any members of centre staff who are taking qualifications at their own centre which include internally assessed components/units;
- any members of centre staff who are teaching and preparing members of their family (which includes step-family, foster family and similar close relationships) or close friends and their immediate family (e.g. son/daughter) for qualifications which include internally assessed components/units;

and maintains clear records of **all instances** where:

- exams office staff have members of their family (which includes step-family, foster family and similar close relationships) or close friends and their immediate family (e.g. son/daughter) being entered for examinations and assessments either at the centre itself or other centres;
- centre staff are taking qualifications at their own centre which do not include internally assessed components/units;
- centre staff are taking qualifications at other centres

The Head of Centre must ensure that the records include details of the measures taken to mitigate any potential risk to the integrity of the qualifications affected. The records may be inspected by a JCQ Centre Inspector and/or awarding body staff. They might be requested in the event of concerns being reported to an awarding body. The records must be retained until the deadline for reviews of marking has passed or until any appeal, malpractice or other results enquiry has been completed, whichever is later.

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/knowledge-hub/general-regulations-for-approved-centres/>

5 Roles and Responsibilities

The Head of Centre is the individual who is accountable to the awarding bodies for ensuring that Belfast Met is compliant with the published JCQ regulations and awarding body requirements in order to ensure the security and integrity of the examinations.

The Head of Centre may not appoint themselves as the Examinations Officer. A Head of Centre and an Examinations Officer are two distinct and separate roles.

The Examinations Officer (EO) is the person appointed by the Head of Centre to act on behalf of, and be the main point of contact for, the centre in matters relating to the general administration of awarding body examinations and assessments. There is one examination officer per centre.

The EO manages the administration of examinations. The EO:

- Receives, checks and stores securely all examination papers and completed scripts.
- Administers access arrangements and makes applications for special consideration using the JCQ publications Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration ([Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](#))
- Identifies and manages examination timetable clashes.
- Line manages Examination Invigilators and organises the training and

monitoring of a team of Examinations Invigilators responsible for the conduct of examinations.

- Arranges for dissemination of examination results and certificates to candidates and forwards any appeals/re-mark requests subject to awarding body guidelines.
- Maintains systems and processes to support the timely entry of candidates for their examinations through course teams.

Lecturers:

- Confirm examination entries/registrations with Exams Officer for awarding organisations if applicable.
- Complete and check all examination-related paperwork (Entries/Coursework/Controlled Assessment Mark submission) in a timely fashion.
- Submit, where appropriate, examination papers and attendance lists for internal examinations e.g. Access Diploma, Foundation Degree and Degrees.
- Notify examinations of any withdrawal of students.

CILD / SENCO is responsible for:

- Notification of access arrangements requirements and updates to Examinations Services staff in a timely manner
- Identification and testing of candidates, and
- requirements for access arrangements.

Invigilators are responsible for:

- Collection of examination papers and other material from the Exams Officer or nominated examination staff from the relevant campus exams office before the start of the examination.
- Assisting with the setting up of examination rooms.
- Taking the attendance register during examinations.
- Collection of all examination papers in the correct order at the end of the examination and their return to the relevant campus examinations office.
- Administering examinations in accordance with JCQ rules and regulations.

Candidates are responsible for:

- Adhering to JCQ rules and regulations regarding examination room procedures.
- Being fully aware of dates, times and venues for their examination.
- Providing Invigilators with Identification to verify themselves for exams
- Bringing all necessary materials for the examination e.g. pens, rulers, protractors, calculators

6 Related Policies (and supporting documents)

Further guidance and supporting documentation will be updated on the College Intranet, College staff should check the Examinations Team Intranet site for these.

Further information around awarding body supporting documentation can be accessed here:

- <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/instructions-for-conducting-examinations-ice/>
- [Preventing Malpractice in Examinations and Assessments: Guidance for Candidates 4.pdf \(ccea.org.uk\)](#)
- <https://www.jcq.org.uk/knowledge-hub/suspected-malpractice-policies-and-procedures/>
- <https://www.jcq.org.uk/knowledge-hub/general-regulations-for-approved-centres/>
- [Post-Results Services - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](#)
- <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-reasonable-adjustments/>

4 Review

The policy will be reviewed on annual basis, or sooner if required to reflect changes to guidance or other circumstances.

7 Complaints

It is hoped that we will be able to resolve any complaint through the College complaints procedure. If the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome they have the right to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Ombudsman's Office (in his/her role as Commissioner for Complaints). The customer can complain to the Ombudsman; however, the Ombudsman will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Customer Complaints Policy.

Further information regarding the College's complaints policy, and making a complaint to the College can be found, here: <https://www.belfastmet.ac.uk/about-us/corporate-information/complaints>

Contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN