

Top tips for running successful mock exams

To help make your mock exams a success, our Exams Officer Engagement Team has shared some helpful hints and key considerations.

Timetabling essentials

- **Decide timetable ownership**
Who builds the schedule and signs it off?
- **Choose a seating strategy**
Whole-cohort blocks or subject-by-subject?
- **Clarify paper expectations**
Full papers, partial papers, or a mix?
- **Balance the load**
Spread sciences and essay subjects to avoid writing-heavy days.
- **Avoid overload**
Three exams in one day makes extra-time/ rest-break management very difficult.
- **Use weekends strategically**
Build in downtime to protect student wellbeing.
- **Rotate annually**
Share early-exam advantages across departments.
- **Anchor the week**
Run whole-cohort exams on Day 1 and the final day to keep everyone aligned and motivated.
- **Late finishes**
Will some exams run over the end of the school day? Consider implications on students; travel arrangements home for example.

Preparation and logistics:

- **Engage stakeholders**
An assembly with students, update parents and highlight in staff briefings so that everyone is clear on their responsibilities
- **Confirm paper production**
Who prints, copies, downloads media and quality-checks materials?
- **Deadlines**
Clear dates on when papers are needed for sorting/enabling access arrangements/different rooms
- **Plan student movement**
Entry, exit, late arrivals and supervision
- **Define paper handling**
Before, during and after the exam
- **Choose invigilators and produce a timetable for them**
Using external invigilators may free up staff for marking. It's also an invigilator training opportunity and the chance for students to become more familiar with them
- **Rehearse JCQ rules**
Let students make mistakes now, not in the live series, but have internal sanctions in place so that they understand there are consequences
- **Share key pupil info**
Access arrangements, special instructions and medical needs
- **Prepare access arrangements**
Rooms, staffing, tech, readers, scribes, prompts, word processors and rest breaks
- **Collect AA evidence**
Ensure use/need is documented for JCQ compliance
- **Pastoral support**
Engage suitable staff to help support students who need extra support on exam day
- **Have a catch-up plan for missed exams**
Who will be responsible for organising these?

- **Capture performance evidence**
Supports resilience requirements
- **Try to test your contingency plans**
Mock exams can provide a useful training opportunity ahead of the external summer exams.

Mock exams are a valuable opportunity to test your processes, identify any gaps and help candidates experience formal exam conditions before the live series.

- They reduce risk in the live series by identifying issues early
- They prepare students for the emotional and procedural reality of formal exams
- They strengthen centre systems and reveal whether improvements are needed before the external exam series starts
- They build staff confidence in processes, timing, and contingency planning

Useful resources

exampro - Thousands of searchable past AQA GCSE and A-level questions, mark schemes and examiner comments. You can make your own customised papers built on topics already taught.

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Ofqual - [Guidance on collecting evidence of student performance to ensure resilience in the qualifications system](#) - [GOV.UK](#)