CYBER SECURITY POLICY (Exams)

Effective from 1 September 2026

This policy is reviewed annually to ensure compliance with current regulations and to reflect centre practice.

Approved/reviewed by	
Florian Crawford	
Date of next review	01/09/2027

Key staff involved in the policy

Role	Name(s)
Head of centre	Florian Crawford
Senior leader(s)	Sue Craggs
Exams Officer	Ayo Olugbile
Other staff	N/A

Purpose of the policy

At the Mary Ward Centre, the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of our information assets, IT systems, and the personal data of students, staff, and stakeholders are of paramount importance.

This policy establishes our comprehensive cyber security framework, delineates the duties and accountabilities of all relevant parties, and ensures strict adherence to JCQ regulations, the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK General Data Protection Regulation, and the statutory guidance detailed in *Keeping Children Safe in Education*.

This policy details the measures taken at the Mary Ward Centre to mitigate the risk of cyber threats under the following sections:

1. Roles and responsibilities
2. Complying with JCQ regulations
3. Cyber security best practice
4. Account management best practice
5. Training

The leadership team recognises the need for staff involved in the management, administration and conducting of examinations to play a critical role in maintaining and improving cyber security at the Mary Ward Centre. This includes ensuring that all members of centre staff who access awarding bodies' online systems undertake annual cyber security training.

In addition to adhering to industry best practices, the following areas are addressed in this policy to ensure that members of the exams team protect their individual digital assets:

- Cyber Security Awareness and Training
- Device Security and Asset Register
- Creating strong, unique passwords
- Keeping all account details secret
- Enabling additional security settings wherever possible
- Updating any passwords that may have been exposed
- Setting up secure account recovery options
- Reviewing and managing connected applications
- Staying alert for all types of social engineering/phishing attempts
- Monitoring accounts and reviewing account access regularly

Scope

This policy applies to all staff who have access to the Mary Ward Centre's IT systems and data, with particular focus placed upon those members of staff who are involved in the management, administration and conducting of examinations and assessments.

Review

A designated member of the Senior Leadership Team will carry out annual evaluation of this policy, incorporating updates as required to remain abreast of new technologies, threat developments, and industry best practices.

Upon completion of the review and any revisions, the policy will receive formal approval from the Head of Centre.

1. Roles and responsibilities

Head of centre

- To provide overall responsibility for policy implementation and cyber security strategy
- To ensure that an up-to-date device security and asset register is maintained which details all computers, devices, and user accounts used for examinations and assessment administration. This ensures that all technology used is regularly reviewed, patched, and secured, thus reducing the risk of overlooked vulnerabilities being exploited
- To ensure that all devices are secured with up-to-date anti-malware and software updates
- To ensure that members of the exams team, supported/led by the IT team, adhere to best practice(s) in relation to:
    - the management of individual/personal data/accounts
    - centre wide cyber security including:
        - Establishing a robust password policy
        - Enabling multi-factor authentication (MFA)
        - Keeping software and systems up to date
        - Implementing network security measures
        - Conducting regular data backups
        - Educating employees on security awareness
        - Developing and testing an incident response plan
        - Regularly assessing and auditing security controls
        - Managing and reporting a cyber-attack which impacts any learner data, assessment records or learner work

IT Manager/Team

- To implement technical controls, monitor systems, respond to incidents, manage access and updates

Data Protection Officer

- To ensure compliance with data protection law, advise on data handling, and oversee data breaches

All staff

- To follow this policy, complete annual training, report incidents or concerns promptly within the centre

Exams officer

- To ensure that they follow best practice in relation to the management of individual/personal data/accounts
- To provide evidence of an awareness of best practice in relation to cyber security as defined by JCQ regulations/guidance, including the completion of annual, up-to-date cyber security awareness training
- To undertake training which must include:
    - the importance of creating strong, unique passwords
    - keeping all account details strictly confidential
    - the critical role of Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) in protecting against unauthorised access
    - how to properly set up and use MFA for both centre and awarding bodies' systems
    - an awareness of all types of social engineering/phishing attempts
    - the importance of staff quickly reporting any suspicious activity, events, incidents and encouraging a safe and supportive reporting culture

Students/users

- To follow this policy, complete annual training, report incidents or concerns promptly within the centre

2. Complying with JCQ regulations

The head of centre at the Mary Ward Centre must ensure that there are procedures in place to maintain the security of user accounts in line with JCQ regulations (section 3.38 of the *General Regulations for Approved Centres* document) by:

- Developing and maintaining this comprehensive cyber security policy
- Ensuring that all members of centre staff who access awarding bodies' online systems undertake annual cyber security training
- Holding a record of completed staff cyber security training on file for inspection (This record could take the form of a certificate, a paper checklist, a spreadsheet-based checklist or a Learning Management System (LMS) report)
- Implementing and enforcing robust security measures, including:
    - where available, MFA must be used for all accounts and systems containing exam-related information, including those that interface between awarding body and centre systems, to enhance security and protect sensitive data (Where MFA is not available on the centre's systems, an equivalent multi-layered security approach must be in place. For example, strong log-in controls, access and monitoring controls and secure storage so that exam-related data is protected in line with cyber security best practice.)
    - regularly reviewing and updating security settings to align with current best practices
- Updating any passwords that may have been exposed
- Setting up secure account recovery options
- Reviewing and managing connected applications
- Monitoring accounts and regularly reviewing account access, including removing access when no longer required
- Ensuring authorised members of staff securely access awarding bodies' online systems in line with awarding body regulations regarding cyber security and the JCQ document *Guidance for centres on cyber security* (www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/general-regulations/), and that where necessary, they have access to a device which complies with awarding bodies' MFA requirements
- Reporting any actual or suspected compromise of an awarding body's online systems immediately to the relevant awarding body

3. Cyber security best practice

The head of centre at the Mary Ward Centre will ensure that:

- Security measures are in place including:
    - Firewalls and network security controls
    - Anti-virus and anti-malware software on all devices
    - Regular software updates and patch management
    - Secure data backup and tested recovery procedures
    - Encryption for sensitive and personal data
    - Multi-factor authentication (MFA) for critical systems and remote access
    - Secure configuration and monitoring of cloud services (e.g., Office 365, Google Workspace).
    - Prompt removal of access for leavers
- They and all staff involved in the management, administration and conducting of examinations/assessments stay informed about the latest security threats and trends in account security
- Staff within the exams team are educated on how to identify phishing attempts, use secure devices and how to protect systems and data by online training.

Best practice, advice and guidance from the training is observed for all IT systems, particularly those where learner information, learner work or assessment records are held.

National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) training and guidance is followed at the Mary Ward Centre which includes:

- Establishing a robust password policy
- Enabling multi-factor authentication (MFA)
- Keeping software and systems up to date
- Implementing network security measures
- Conducting regular data backups
- Educating employees on security awareness
- Developing and testing an incident response plan
- Regularly assessing and auditing security controls

The Exams Office training and guidance is followed at the Mary Ward Centre which includes:

- Good practice in creating strong and unique passwords
- Account security: Keeping account details secret (including sharing passwords, remembering passwords and monitoring account access)
- Additional security settings (including, multi-factor/two-step/two-factor authentication, the security of confidential examination materials)
- Updating expired or exposed passwords
- Account recovery (including recovery options)
- Reviewing and managing connected applications (including reviewing and removing access, using a third-party or a cloud service, granting permissions, saving passwords, saving details on local web browsers, using a shared browser)
- Social engineering/phishing attempts (including suspicious emails and phone calls, sharing information, QR codes, phishing attempts, recovery plan)
- Monitoring and reviewing access (including suspicious, unusual or unauthorised activity, departing staff, levels of access, reviewing user accounts)
- Identifying cyber security good practice via a range of exam-related scenarios

Exam specific guidance is also provided on each of the areas listed above

By adopting industry standard cyber security best practices, the head of centre/senior leadership team are significantly reducing the risk of cyber-attacks and protecting valuable data and assets within the centre.

If a cyber-attack which impacts any learner data, assessment records or learner work is experienced, the senior leadership team/exams manager/officer will contact the relevant awarding body/bodies immediately for advice and support.

4. Account management best practice

Creating strong unique passwords

- *Password governance follows National Cyber Security Centre guidance*
- *Exams office staff are informed that password length is a more valuable defence than complexity and instructed to use a password creation approach such as three random words to generate suitably secure passwords*
- *Exams office staff will not use easily guessable information such as birthdays, singular names or common words for a password*
- *For every account, users are instructed to use a strong unique password and that the same password is not used across any other account(s)*

Keeping all account details secret

- *Exams office staff are instructed never to share login/password details or additional factor/authentication codes with anyone else*
- *Staff who require access to a system will request their own user account and never share an account assigned for their use with anyone else. Staff are reminded that anything done with an account assigned to someone will be attributed to that person in the first instance*

Enabling additional security settings wherever possible

- *All staff will follow awarding body two-step verification (2SV)/two-factor verification (2FA) or multi-factor authentication (MFA) wherever available/requested. Staff are made aware of the purpose of 2SV/2FA /MFA, which includes:*
  - *adding a layer of account security*
  - *helps to protect users if the extra steps/factors are protected*

Updating any passwords that may have been exposed

- *If it is believed that a password may have been exposed/become known to others, staff will inform their senior leader/line manager immediately*
- *Any exposed passwords will be changed as soon as possible, and the new passwords should not be shared with anyone*
- *Staff are instructed to use strong unique passwords (e.g. three random words) when changing passwords and that old passwords should not be reused nor should cycling through a small set of passwords across multiple accounts be used*

Setting up secure account recovery options

follow secure account recovery options.

Examples

- *Staff are instructed to follow centre account recovery options which include: [Detail centre account recovery options, which may include alternate email accounts or phone numbers protected by 2SV/2FA/MFA security measures]*

Reviewing and managing connected applications

- *Staff within the exams team will regularly review and remove access for third-party applications or services that no longer require access to accounts*
- *Staff will be informed that access should only be provided to trusted services*
- *Staff will be asked to be particularly cautious when interacting with content and services (e.g. quizzes, prize draws, surveys etc.)*

- *Staff will only grant permissions to required applications or the necessary access to allow them to function*
- *Staff will only download and install applications with established reputations from trusted sources*
- *Staff will not save passwords to local web browsers unless a secure password manager extension is used in a browser that requires unlocking (e.g. with another password) before the saved account details can be retrieved, however care will be taken to ensure that this is locked/signed out of after use*
- *When using a shared browser, staff will clear browser history and caches after use*

Staying alert for all types of social engineering/phishing attempts

Staff must take care if unsolicited or unexpected emails, instant messages, or phone calls are received asking for account credentials or personal or confidential information. Passwords and 2FA/MFA authentication codes should not be given out to anyone

- *Staff are instructed that they should have a wariness of anyone or anything that seems to want to gain their trust, rush them into doing something or that just seems off, they should hang up/not reply and not click on links or take any action and check with a trusted party via a secure channel (i.e. call awarding body customer services via a known support number)*
- *Staff will never approve or authenticate a login request that they did not initiate*
- *Staff will not share codes/approve logins. Requests to share codes/approve logins should be treated with a high degree of suspicion*
- *Staff will not click on suspicious links, download attachments or scan QR codes from unknown sources*
- *The centre will provide exams team staff with a secure QR code scanner with a good reputation to help gauge whether a QR code is suspicious or malicious*
- *Staff will verify the authenticity of any communication by contacting the organisation directly through official known channels*
- *Staff will report any phishing attempts which reference awarding bodies/their systems to the awarding body concerned immediately*

Monitoring accounts and reviewing account access

- *Centre staff accounts will be routinely reviewed for any suspicious, unusual or unauthorised activity*
- *If any suspicious, unusual or potentially unauthorised activity on awarding body systems is observed this will be immediately reported to the relevant awarding body, particularly if it is believed that user account security may have been compromised*
- *Access control and permissions are based on job roles and reviewed regularly*
- *Levels of access for all exams team staff are reviewed regularly to ensure accounts have the minimum level of access required for their current role*
- *Accounts are promptly disabled when users leave*
- *Account activity is monitored and audited*

5. Training

The head of centre/senior leadership team ensure that there are procedures in place to maintain the security of user accounts by ensuring that all staff who have responsibility for the administration or delivery of examinations complete annual cyber security training, with practical advice on protecting assessment systems and recognising attacks such as phishing or social engineering.

Records of completed cyber security training are retained for all staff and are available for inspection.

- *Type/source of training (e.g. online, face-to-face as part of annual INSET)*
- *Evidence (e.g. certification via online training)*
- *Frequency (e.g. annual)*