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As the deadline for entries for the summer 2020 exams series approaches (21 February) so the process begins for exams officers to gather information from teaching staff. This may seem like a straightforward task, but unless an exams officer is well prepared and has planned for this key task it can lead to a range of issues, including financial penalties for the centre and students enduring unnecessary stress...and a time when centres should be creating an environment which enables students to perform to the best of their ability.

In order to ensure that exam entries are made accurately and to deadline, exams officers must be aware of:

- the information they need to acquire
- the members of staff they need to approach to acquire this information
- the deadline for submitting entry information to awarding bodies
- the process for submitting entry information to awarding bodies

Making exam entries can be a very stressful and difficult period for exams officers, particularly those new to the role, but with sound planning, clear instructions, and the setting of realistic deadlines, this key task can be completed successfully and to deadline.

So, what steps do you need to take when gathering information in order to submit exam entries?

(Note: At this stage of the academic year, you need to identify all the qualifications your centre is delivering for examination/assessment during the 2019/20 academic year. Information around specific qualifications and candidates will be collected later as final entry/registration deadlines approach.)

Step 1 - Create an [Information gathering form](#) which asks for the following:

- Year group (or cohort) intending to take the qualification
- Qualification information, including:
 - Qualification type: GCSE, (GCE) A Level, AS Level, BTEC Firsts, Cambridge National, etc.
 - Awarding body
 - Specification title and code: the specification code may be the same as the entry code
 - Qualification number: this should be found in the specification
 - Entry code: (may also be referred to as award code or certification entry code for unitised specifications) will normally be a single entry code for linear specifications (and programme number for BTECs)
 - Option code: some subjects offer a choice of assessment options or tier level
 - Unit entry code(s): this will not apply to linear specifications that have a single entry code
 - Exam series: For linear specifications this will be when the whole qualification is taken in the final (terminal) exam series at the end of the course; for other (unitised) specifications where units may be taken in one or more exam series

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- Estimated number of entries
- Registration/qualification entry requirement: Certain qualifications may require:
 - an upfront registration entry for candidates at the start of the course and unit entries made for external assessments by the relevant exam series deadline(s) (e.g. BTEC programmes)
 - qualification entries to be made for candidates before test unit entries for timetabled tests are made by the relevant exam series deadline(s) (e.g. Cambridge Technicals)
 - candidates to be registered by the qualification registration deadline and examined units and externally marked units entered by the relevant exam series deadline(s) (e.g. AQA Tech-levels)

Step 2 - Ensure that you liaise with the relevant person within teaching teams to gather this information. This is their field of expertise, although you may need to point them to awarding body administrative guides when relevant entry code information may not be clearly detailed in the awarding body specification they are delivering.

Step 3 - Set a deadline for the completion and return of the *Information gathering form*. Inform your SLT/Line Manager that the form has been disseminated, the internal deadline set, and their role in the event of non-submission from teaching teams

Step 4 – Clearly explain how the *Information gathering form* will be collected. It is recommended that all returns are made via email so you can monitor (and evidence) all correspondence with teaching teams.

Step 5 – If you need to liaise with teaching teams, either to provide instructions, answer any queries or request additional information, ensure that this is conducted via email asking for a ‘read receipt’ for all emails. This will inform you when emails are read and in the event of any ‘misunderstanding’ you will be able to clearly identify what was sent, when it was sent, and the individuals involved.

Step 6 – Be clear with teaching teams that this information is the first stage of a process to ensure that correct entry information is submitted on time to awarding bodies. Explain that the next stage will involve acquiring specific qualification and candidate information, and identify the timelines for when you will be approaching teaching teams for this information and its return to a strict internal deadline

Ideally, the information detailed above should be collected towards the end of the summer term to enable forward planning for the new academic year and to provide awarding bodies with any early information where they may require this. Alternatively, you may decide to gather information at the start of the autumn term in the new academic year.

Once you have collated this initial information from teaching teams you should ensure all qualifications are identified by checking timetabling or other relevant reports or information held in your centre (or in your MIS system) to ensure all qualifications have been identified. It is good practice to collate all this information into a summary providing one single/central point of reference – this could become your [annual qualifications plan](#). Such a plan would also be useful to inform contingency planning in case of teaching staff or EO absence and to cross

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reference at entries time to ensure that all entries have been made at the appropriate time.

The need for effective planning is key in ensuring that exams are administered successfully in your centre. With regard to exam entries this is even more significant as the 'penalties' for failing to submit entries accurately and on time may not only impact negatively upon finances in your centre, but also on the students...and that is a situation which every Head of centre, SLT member, teacher will want to avoid. To ensure that you are not faced with this issue, support your exams officer in the coming weeks and months in acquiring the necessary exam entry information.

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