

January 2020 blog

This month's blog is written by Lisa Longstaff, exams officer at Dunottar School, who considers the importance of submitting exam entries accurately and to deadline.

Well organised exams officers, who ensure thorough planning, will successfully submit exam entries - accurately and to awarding body deadlines. This will also support candidates as they prepare for their examinations, and save unnecessary costs for your centre...

There is no doubt that the secret to ensuring a successful examination series lies in the planning, included in which there is the submission of exam entries to awarding body deadlines.

You can find useful information for both new and experienced EOs in *The Exams Office 2019/2020 Exams Officer Handbook*, and a range of support materials on their [website](#), which will guide you through the process. All the awarding bodies provide guidance too and are always happy to take your calls if you cannot find the answer you need. I can recall thinking I needed a hotline to them in my first couple of years in the role, and there is still always something new to learn and ask!

Key dates are published by all the boards and JCQ to help you plan your own deadlines. These have been amalgamated by *The Exams Office* in their [Key Dates Calendar Tool](#). There is also the [Annual Exam Plan template](#) on *The Exams Office* website that you can adapt for your centre to give you an overview. It is good practice to ask teaching staff for information by a much earlier date than the awarding body deadline, so for example, ask for May/June entries to be with you by end January at the very latest. This will enable you to submit – and check - entries in good time for the 21 February deadline, particularly of this falls within half-term.

Before you submit entries, you will need to undertake a series of tasks to ensure that these are accurate. Most exams officers will use a Management Information System (MIS) to make entries via A2C and will download the basedata from the relevant awarding bodies. For those centres where there is no MIS system, the alternative to submit entries is to use individual awarding bodies' secure extranet site, and there is guidance for using these on the relevant awarding body websites.

Section 5.6 (page 16) of the JCQ [General Regulations](#) booklet is devoted to entries and should be referred to ensure compliance. Within this section, the only item highlighted as an amendment for this academic year is to clarify (in Section 5.6f) that the centre will '*...enter a candidate who is not on roll at the centre who is following a qualification as a private candidate.*' Most MIS will facilitate this or you can make the entry on the awarding bodies' secure extranet site for a private candidate.

Candidate numbers and Unique Candidate Identifiers (UCI) are vital for entries and these can be generated via your MIS, ideally during the Autumn term. In addition to Year 10 students, you may also have new pupils in other exam years who will require a candidate number and UCI. For students arriving from other centres, I issue them with a new candidate number but retain their existing UCI, as this helps to link their results from their previous school(s). The JCQ General Regulations also state (in Section 5.6i) that centres will '*...verify the identity of all students that they enter for examinations or assessments.*' Your MIS will contain accurate candidate records, acting as a confirmation that information was checked at registration and also enabling you to print photo ID

cards which can be used in the exam room to meet JCQ regulations in confirming the identity of candidates.

If you have used *The Exams Office* [Information gathering form](#) you will be aware of which subjects are being taught and the specification details for entries. If you have not completed this task, then, as a matter of urgency, you should acquire this information from Heads of Department.

It is likely that candidate entries will not be confirmed and submitted until mock exams are completed and information such as levels/tiers have been decided. You should also check that you have the correct information on your MIS. In my centre, I use iSAMs which requires me to ensure that the *Current Programmes* (subjects taught) are correct, create any 'new' subjects, and archiving as required so that I can link the basedata to the relevant programme. I set up entries for those subjects that I know are unlikely to change, such as GCSE English Language, and then I await information from teaching staff where subjects have tiered examinations. Once all the entries are set up, I print a preview for the Heads of Department to approve prior to completing and submitting entries via A2C in good time ahead of the 21 February deadline.

Once you have submitted entries, there may be reasons to make changes, such as requests for amendments to tiers, or even withdrawing a candidate's entries. I find it is best to

In order to avoid late entries you should acquire approval from SLT to confirm that the responsibility for submitting the correct entry information, and to deadline, rests with individual subject departments and, if possible, that their budget will be impacted if the information given to the exams officer is not correct, or if it is submitted after your internally set deadline. If this is the case, you should also note that some changes may be unavoidable.

Another task which will need to be undertaken is the checking of awarding bodies' deadlines for late and very late entry fees. These may be required for students who arrive at your centre after the entry deadline. As exam entry costs can rapidly increase with late entries and thus impact upon your centre budget, the total additional cost should be highlighted to all teaching staff – and SLT. You may also consider sharing exams entry fees, particularly if you work in the Independent sector as these are often added to academic fees and will be required by your finance department for invoicing. However, for all exams centres this is a useful exercise as it allows you to identify total exam fees, including late entry fees where you can pinpoint which subject departments are responsible for these additional costs.

Believe me, there is no better feeling for an exams officer than starting their February half-term knowing that the entries have been submitted!