

The Exams Office update

Statement - 23 March 2020

Although the exams officer community is very familiar with contingency planning, the current situation in relation to the Coronavirus crisis is particularly challenging. The speedy response from the authorities to the crisis has been very helpful, but recent announcements have only led to more questions from centres and candidates in relation to this summer's examination series and the awarding of grades.

The Exams Office will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide advice and guidance to exams officers as further information becomes available.

Following the [Department for Education's announcement on Friday 20 March confirming the process for calculating students' grades](#), this is what we know of the awarding process for summer 2020:

Step 1 - The awarding bodies will be asking teachers to submit their judgement about the grade that they believe the student would have received if exams had gone ahead

Step 2 - To produce the above, teachers will take into account a range of evidence and data including performance in mock exams and non-exam assessment

Step 3 - The exam boards will then combine this information with other relevant data, including prior attainment, and use this information to produce a calculated grade for each student, which will be a best assessment of the work they have put in

Step 4 - Calculated grades will aim to be provided to students before the end of July

Step 5 - If students do not believe the correct process has been followed in their case they will be able to appeal on that basis

Step 6 - If students do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam at the earliest reasonable opportunity, once schools are open again. Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021

Naturally, the next question will be how the above will work in practice in centres. *The Exams Office* recognises that exams officers in each centre will play a critical role in ensuring that the process as set out by the DfE is administered accurately and efficiently.

As the 'gatekeepers' of exams administration and regulations within their centre, exams officers will provide the key link with the awarding organisations and Ofqual in ensuring that staff and candidates are kept up-to-date and that awarding body guidelines are being followed. However, exams officers will play a far more significant role than simply sharing information between their centre and the relevant authorities.

Below is a brief summary of the significance of exams officers in ensuring that their centre is prepared for challenges in the coming months, and how *The Exams Office* will be supporting members with additional support.

What role will I play as an exams officer in the coming months?

In a word, pivotal. As with every exams series, exams officers will be required to liaise with awarding bodies. The system proposed by the DfE for this summer suggests an even more significant role for exams officers, who, at the very least, will need to keep abreast of awarding body information as they may be involved in any/all of the following:

- Acquiring and disseminating information relating to the submission of grades from relevant awarding bodies to subject staff and vice versa
- Managing/co-ordinating correspondence from relevant awarding organisations following the submission of grade information
- Downloading results information from awarding bodies – possibly via the secure areas of their websites
- Devising a process to disseminate final grade information to students by the end of July – this may include organising a ‘results day’
- Managing the appeals process if students do not believe that the correct process has been followed
- Preparing for and organising an exams series once schools are open again

As further information relating to the awarding process is released in the coming weeks, *The Exams Office* will provide further information and the necessary support to help exams officers devise and implement processes and procedures within their centre. However, in preparation, exams officers should begin to consider the role they may play in some/all of the above within their centre.

Where can I get the latest information from the relevant parties?

It will be imperative that centres keep up to date with the latest information from the relevant authorities/awarding organisations. Exams officers will play a key role in ensuring that senior leaders and subject staff have the correct information in order to comply with the requirements around this year’s awarding process.

Exams officers should regularly visit the websites of key stakeholders such as the Department for Education, Ofqual, Joint Council for Qualifications, and relevant awarding bodies to ensure that they are acting upon the latest advice.

However, *The Exams Office* appreciates that this can be a time consuming task, so we have launched a page on our website dedicated to providing exams officers with the [latest information from all key stakeholders](#).

What additional support will *The Exams Office* provide to support me through this process?

The Exams Office is working on a range of initiatives to help exams officers through the coming months and this summer’s awarding process. These include the following:

1. **Stakeholder liaison** – We have written to Ofqual, JCQ and the major awarding bodies to offer our support (see below), and to act as an additional channel to disseminate information to exams officers. We have also offered our services as an organisation which can provide expert advice and guidance in relation to the management, administration and conducting of examinations.

2. Summer conferences 2020

Content

We will continue to closely monitor government advice regarding the staging of large-scale events, but should the Summer Conferences due to take place in Leeds on 2 July and London on 9 July still go ahead, we will alter the agenda to solely focus upon this year's awarding process.

We have invited Ofqual and the JCQ to deliver keynote speeches which specifically relate to the requirements for this summer, and we have contacted the major awarding organisations to offer workshop slots which will enable them to convey information specific to their organisation.

The Summer Conferences will also provide exams officers with an opportunity to meet awarding body representatives and address centre-specific issues.

An additional conference

Subject to confirmation that the Summer Conferences can proceed, we are looking into the viability of adding a third Summer Conference in early/mid-July at the Ricoh Arena, Coventry (date TBC).

Recording presentations

To support members who are unable to attend these conferences, we will film all presentations and provide online access to these as soon as possible after the final conference.

3. **Exams series 2020** – If centres do allow students the opportunity to sit an exam once schools are open again there may be a shortage of invigilators or the need to recruit invigilators at short notice. To ensure that centres have enough trained invigilators for an exams series, we will be increasing the number of invigilator user accounts per administrator account (within our Online Portal) from 70 to 100. We will also add additional capacity to our servers to ensure that additional user demand can be met.
4. **Support materials** – Once the process for awarding grades is confirmed, *The Exams Office* will produce additional support materials to assist exams officers in completing key tasks specific to this year's awarding accurately and efficiently.
5. **Stakeholders** – We will attempt to represent the exams officer community amongst key stakeholders to ensure that any decisions that are made take into consideration the role performed by exams officers.
6. **Moving forward** – Once this crisis is overcome, *The Exams Office* will convene a meeting with key stakeholders to discuss the lessons learnt from the pandemic and suggest measures which can mitigate the impact of a similar situation in the future.

These may be unprecedented times, but we must also recognise that they are temporary and that we will soon return to normality. We will use this experience to ensure that moving forward we are an even more resilient community.

Although we must not underestimate the challenges which we will face in the coming months, we are confident that the exams officer community will successfully support the process which ensures that their students are awarded grades which accurately reflect their ability.

We can say this because in the coming months exams officers will do exactly what they do every academic year – which is to support colleagues who require assistance, and support every student through the process which ensures that they get the grades they deserve to enable them to continue on the path to employment or further/higher education.

The information above is accurate as of 23 March 2020. *The Exams Office* will provide additional guidance, hints and tips to exams officers as further information becomes available in relation to this summer's awarding process.

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