

## ARTICLE

### Representing the exams officer community

Since its launch in 2014, *The Exams Office* has worked tirelessly to raise the profile of the exams officer community, and whilst there have been some notable successes, there is a growing demand for an organisation to be formed which has the sole aim of doing so.

*The Exams Office* was formed to safeguard the exams process in centres, support exams officers in undertaking their everyday roles, and to underpin the work of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) and their awarding bodies.

Although *The Exams Office* ensured that the views of exams officers were at the forefront of the JCQ's *Independent Malpractice Commission*, and has formed excellent links with Ofqual and the JCQ to raise awareness of the key role played by exams officers within centres (as is being witnessed in discussion around this summer's awarding process), this may be the time for another organisation to be formed with the primary objective of further elevating the status of the role within the education sector.

So, what should any prospective representative group do in order to address the needs of the exams officer community?

#### Representation amongst key stakeholders

Firstly, any organisation should work in collaboration with key stakeholders. In addition to supporting the work of Ofqual, JCQ and the awarding bodies, this organisation should collaborate with other representative groups to ensure that the concerns of exams officers are represented, and that the role is taken into account when changes are considered.

The organisation should attempt to influence change for the benefit of exams officers and champion the pivotal role played by exams officers in the management, administration and conducting of examinations. It is imperative that groups representing heads of centres and senior leaders are encouraged to emphasise to their members the need for adequate support for exams officers.

The views of members should be sought on a regular basis (via online surveys, focus groups etc.) and represented to the relevant stakeholders. There may also need to be targeted campaigns to support exams officers in specific areas such as remuneration, working hours, working conditions, additional roles etc.

#### Support

A representative organisation should provide advice and guidance for exams officers. This may include advice on employment rights, and possible involvement in issues at centre level, encouraging centres to adopt the suggested job descriptions as devised by *The Exams Office*, advice for centres on interviewing prospective employees, as well as advice for individuals being interviewed.

## ARTICLE

Articles detailing good practice, hints and tips should be produced to encourage centres to adopt leading edge practice in the delivery of examinations.

### **Professional development and recognising achievement**

To increase the status of the profession and of the exams officer role, any organisation should encourage the introduction of some form of industry-standard qualification. Endorsed by key organisations and updated annually, the qualification would confirm knowledge and understanding of rules and regulations and should be available to existing exams officers or to those wishing to apply for exams officer positions.

Any qualification must be straightforward to access and complete and able to confirm that the individual is 'qualified' to undertake the role of an exams officer. It may also support professional development and annual appraisals.

Additional professional development opportunities could also be offered, including the hosting of an annual conference with content focussed on the skills required to serve as an effective and efficient exams officer, considers personal wellbeing, and provides a source of acquiring good practice, hints and tips.

A longer-term objective in relation to 'professionalising' the role should be to devise a set of standards in association with, and approved by, key stakeholders. Not only will such standards help to raise the profile and status of the role within the education sector, but they will also emphasise the significance of the role amongst senior leaders at centre level.

To continually develop these standards and to ensure that they are relevant and fit for purpose, the experience and expertise of current exams officers should be drawn upon to create a strong and influential network. This group should develop and drive forward these standards to enhance the reputation of exams officers and the role. The individuals within this group should be recognised (e.g. as 'fellows') for the role they are playing in developing and shaping the role of an exams officer.

To ensure that the exams officer role could be viewed as a career, pathways should be devised and highlighted which detail future career possibilities and the transferrable skills which are acquired whilst undertaking the role and are much sought after within, and outside, the education sector.

Finally, to reward and recognise achievement and commitment to the role, by individuals or groups of exams officers, an awards evening/ceremony could be staged in conjunction with key organisations.

### **Networking**

One of the key roles of any representative organisation should be to encourage and facilitate networking amongst the exams officer community. This could be achieved by the creation of online forums, sharing good practice in hard copy or online publications, and opportunities for members to meet face-to-face to share good practice and resolve issues.

## ARTICLE

### Accreditation and endorsement

It should be the responsibility of any organisation representing exams officers to vet any organisations or commercial partners which are associated with the management, administration and conducting of examinations. A process should be devised which ensures that only organisations which deliver quality products and resources and value for money are endorsed and recommended to members. Products may carry the organisational logo as a quality mark to confirm their suitability thus providing reassurance for members and centres.

### Training

Although *The Exams Office* provides a wide range of support for exams officers in the management, administration and conducting of examinations, there may be specific areas in which a representative organisation may provide further support. This could include tailored support for centres in the further education (FE) or special educational needs sector, or for centres delivering qualifications associated with the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB). Conferences and training events hosted by organisations such as the Association of Colleges (AoC) could be supported with workshops, and resources could be produced to support exams officers in these centres or those engaged in non-JCQ awarding body qualifications.

The launch of an effective representative organisation for the exams officer community is not a simple task, but one that is long overdue. It is imperative that those who form such an organisation have a clear understanding of the needs of the community. They must acquire the views of exams officers on a regular basis, represent the views of the community amongst those with influence, and communicate clearly with members. There must be a strategy, and timeframe, in place which details aims and objectives and how these will be achieved.

As the outcomes of the JCQ's *Independent Malpractice Commission* are being delivered, and the impact of this summer's awarding process are being felt across every centre, there has never been a better time to launch an organisation which represents exams officers and raises their profile and status.