

A little time to reflect on the events of the past few months and consider the tasks ahead...

This month's blog is written by Marcia Woods, formerly exams officer at Brookfield Community School and currently an invigilator trainer for **The Exams Office**, who considers some of the challenges facing exams officers at the start of the 2020/21 academic year.

Welcome to the start of a new academic year, I hope that you are all keeping safe and well and are ready to face a new term!

Please note I did not say welcome back, as I know that many of you have not managed to take the break you might have been planning over July and August due to the ever changing issues involved around results days and the subsequent appeals process. If you are a new exams officer, can I take this opportunity to say welcome to the world of exams and reassure you that although you may be wondering what you have let yourself in for, with the excellent support provided by **The Exams Office** this role can be very rewarding.

So, what might September have in store for us all this year, and what tasks might you need to be focusing on in the next few weeks?

Appeals regarding Summer 2020 results

You may have received requests from some of your students for information regarding the summer 2020 appeals process, which is different from the normal process. Please make sure that you refer to the JCQ document regarding this year's [appeals process](#) as the grounds for an appeal are fairly limited. Also be aware that, although you might have a role to play in obtaining information to support an appeal, your Head of Centre **must** authorise the appeal. The buck stops with them, not you, however much grief you might have received from agitated students, parents, or teaching staff. I am sure that you have the date imprinted in your brains, but the deadline for submitting requests for initial reviews to the awarding bodies is 17 September. **The Exams Office** have produced an [appeals template](#) for you to use which may be of help to you.

October and November exams for students who would like to demonstrate their ability via a written paper

Once the initial impact of this year's results days has settled and most students have had time to plan their next steps, hopefully you will not have too many candidates to enter for this 'extraordinary' Autumn exam series but if required, **The Exams Office** have come to our rescue with [A guide to preparing for entries](#) which explains what needs to be considered for GCE and GCSE exams taking place in October and November.

There are some very tight deadlines for making entries – A level entries should have been submitted by 4 September, GCSEs (except for English and Maths) should be submitted by 18 September and GCSE English and Maths should be submitted by 4 October 2020. Entries can be

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submitted after these dates, but they will incur penalty fees which could increase the cost to your school's budget.

Please note that if you have A level students needing to sit university admissions tests (eg for Oxford or Cambridge) the deadline for those entries is 15 October, so you have a bit of breathing space!

The expectation is that the exam centre where the student would have taken their exams in summer 2020 will make exam entries and host students for these October and November exams. The exception will be students 'resitting' GCSE Maths or English to gain a grade 4 – then the FE college they have moved on to will be expected to take responsibility.

The Department for Education (DfE) will be launching their new [Exams Support Service](#) early in the September term to provide assistance to schools with regard to exam sites or invigilators, and to help schools claim a refund of exam fees if these are greater than the refunds schools have received from awarding bodies for summer exam fees. The DfE does not expect candidates to be asked to pay for their entry fees for this exam series unless there are extenuating circumstances.

If you have made entries for the October/November exam series you will need to start planning for these exam days. It is almost six months since you were planning for a nice, ordinary, summer season, so it will be weird to start thinking about the practicalities of exams days again, but **The Exams Office** have come to our assistance again with a very useful [guide to managing exam preparation](#).

Don't forget you will have to organise all the normal things too, like rooms and invigilators. I know that finding rooms to accommodate the exams may well be even more of a challenge alongside social distancing and 'bubbles', but this is where you need to consult with your SLT to come up with a plan. You may be able to provide suggested solutions, but it is their responsibility to make things are put in place and instruct all school staff what needs to happen on exam days. We will need to consider government rules regarding social distancing and preventing the spread of Covid 19 as well as JCQ regulations, so **The Exams Office** article which considers [conducting examinations in line with health and safety recommendations](#) may be of help.

As usual, you will need to ensure that all school staff are aware of the regulations regarding exams, including keep exam papers secure, so make sure that your reception and site staff know what they need to do when exam papers are delivered to school, and ensure that you maintain a log of papers arriving at your school and being transported and unpacked in your secure storage facility.

There is some good news regarding this Autumn series and Access Arrangements. Although at the time of writing this blog, JCQ had not published the *Information for conducting examinations* (ICE) for 2020-2010, they have updated their guidance on *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* and also published [additional information relating to access arrangements](#) for the 2020/21 academic year. One interesting announcement is the extension of the cut-off date for any access arrangements that centres had in place for summer 2020 until 27 November 2020, so your SENCO will not need to make a new application for the October and November exams. Your SENCO will need to make sure that the original evidence is available for inspection if

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required. This document also requests that schools provide Form 8 evidence to FE colleges to use, even if there is not normally a close relationship between the establishments.

Finally, you may be thinking about getting training for you, your invigilators or your SLT during this new term and beyond. **The Exams Office** is planning a number of studio-filmed versions of *Actions for Autumn* for those unable to attend and *Managing an exam series* training to support exams officers through the autumn exam series. If you have not yet booked on to any training have a look at the [training pages](#) of the **The Exams Office** website for full information. I have booked to attend the *Exams Changes* training event in Leeds on 13 October and I am really looking forward to meeting up with colleagues, even if it is at a suitable distance and sporting a 'TEO branded' facemask – will definitely make a change to a bag!

Oh, one final, finally: If you have been working all through the summer, I really do hope that you can negotiate with your SLT to have a few days off to recharge your batteries and completely switch off from your emails. A planned absence of a few days will be a much better idea than having to implement your school's exams contingency plan because you are off sick.

Good luck for the coming term, I hope that everything goes smoothly for you and your school/college.