

Preparing to submit entries for the summer exams series...

This month's blog is written by Lisa Longstaff, exams officer at Dunottar School, who considers the tasks and processes involved in submitting exam entries for the summer exams series.

Now that we have completed an autumn term which contained so much uncertainty and unknowns, the prospect of spring and lighter evenings also brings one task which all exams officers can plan for with certainty...and that is submitting entries for the summer 2021 exam series!

Despite a later-than-usual start to the summer 2021 exam series, exam entries must still take place by the deadline of 21st February for GCE and GCSE qualifications and other qualifications where indicated by the awarding body. From an exams officer perspective, this gives me a positive feeling as this is something familiar that I know how to deal with...even if this falls on a Sunday in 2021! Even if you are new to exams, rest assured that exam entries are always required and are relatively straightforward, you just need to ensure that you follow a process (see [A guide to managing entries](#) on **The Exams Office** website) and plan to ensure that all tasks are completed to deadline. You cannot submit exam entries without information from teaching staff, so clear and precise instructions are also needed to ensure that you receive information in good time to complete your tasks – it should be emphasised to SLT and teaching staff that the submission of entries after the 21st February deadline will incur late fees, and that even after information is submitted, there is considerable work for an exams officer to undertake before an exam entry is confirmed. Therefore, it is not acceptable for teaching staff to submit exam entry information to an exams officer on 21st February – ideally, you should be receiving this at least 2 weeks prior to this date (a timescale which may be increased or decreased depending on the size of your cohort and the timing of your centre's half term holiday period).

Working back from your own deadline, allow for time to request entries, then enter them on your Management Information System (MIS) and print off the statements of entry by subject for the heads of departments to check and return to you. Once I receive these, I send each candidate a statement of their own entry for checking (including their personal details) with information relating to any amendments, for example, the deadline for informing me of any amendments. The importance of asking candidates to check their personal details is critical in that it prevents any issues with names/dates of birth on certificates etc. As this whole process can take 3 or 4 weeks, I begin making initial requests for information mid-January.

There is a period after entries are submitted for making amendments and withdrawals without incurring a penalty fee – but I prefer to use this as a contingency measure for any exceptional circumstances. This includes subjects, particularly those with tiers, which have delays in submitting entry information as they are awaiting mock examination results. It is advisable to work closely with these departments to ensure that the deadlines are still met and, if required, amending a candidate's entry after the 21st February deadline but within the amendment/withdrawal deadline(s) (which vary between awarding bodies). To help support contingency planning in my centre, I have a written record of the process for

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collating exam information and submitting this to the relevant awarding body. This step-by-step guide will be invaluable to my colleagues if they are required to complete this task in the event of my absence.

You should be aware by now of the subjects that your centre offers at GCSE and GCE A /AS level and the awarding bodies whose specifications are being followed. It is important to keep in regular contact with heads of department over this information, as occasionally, they may change which board they use for their subject. If this is the case, you must be kept informed of any such changes. I strongly recommend using the [Information gathering form template](#) which is available on **The Exams Office** website. I email this form to heads of departments the previous June/July asking them to confirm exams information – including the qualification taken, awarding body used, and approximate candidate numbers – and to detail any changes for the new academic year, if applicable.

When handling qualification and exam entry information, exams officers (particularly those new to the role) should be aware of the different options and combinations which exist depending on the subject and qualification. For example, whilst all subjects have a main entry code, for some subjects there are options that are chosen by the subject department from a range of topics. These entry options may need to be individually added to the certification entry, for example for OCR History A level. There may also be an extended main entry code that allows for a valid combination of papers, such as AQA GCSE Religious Studies. There may also be some specific amendments to codes just for this year to consider changes to the papers due to the impact of Covid-19. You should have received notifications about these from the relevant board, so it is worth ensuring that you are receiving updates and emails from the awarding bodies that you use.

Although there are no written papers for most Art subjects, there are still entries to be made...again check with the awarding body to ensure you have the relevant code information for this specific year.

If you are using a Management Information System (MIS), you will need to upload basedata from each exam board's main website to your MIS. If you have any issues or questions, contact your IT department or the software provider, and exam board staff may be able to assist too. Most centres use [A2C](#) to submit their entries to the exam boards, which is compatible with most MIS software. Centres which do not have a MIS system make entries via the exam boards' secure sites.

Prior to submitting exam entries to an awarding body, you will need to create a candidate number for each of your candidates - a UCI (unique candidate identifier) and a ULN (unique learner number), although most independent schools do not use the latter. [A guide to managing entries](#) provides further information on UCIs and ULNs. There is also a range of particularly useful additional guides and form templates on **The Exams Office** website which exams officers may find of help in relation to exam entries, including help in gathering information on late entries, changes to entries and a document for supporting private candidates (if applicable to your centre).

Once exam entries have been submitted, I produce a centre-wide timetable – which is forwarded to SLT and attached to the staff noticeboard – and individual candidate timetables in hard copy for tutors to disseminate. I use different coloured paper for Year 11 and 13, so that

they are easily identified, although that does not completely stop requests from candidates for additional copies as they have mislaid the original!

If you are involved in processing/submitting applications for access arrangements, be aware that the deadline for undertaking this task via Access Arrangements Online has been extended from 21st February to 31st March for the summer 2021 exam series.

Although submitting exam entries is a key task for all exams officers, it is something which can wait until you return in the New Year, so, in the meantime, please try and enjoy the Christmas break, stay safe and here's wishing every exams officer a healthy 2021. If ever there was a period when we need to support each other via our local networks, it is now...and I know that we will do just that in the coming months.