

## What a difference a year makes...

This month's blog is written by Marcia Woods, former exams officer at Brookfield Community School, who considers the impact of Covid-19 upon exams officers, and the role which they will play in this summer's grading and awarding process.

Well, what a year it has been. It seems strange that this time a year ago a global pandemic was just announcing itself to the world and the unprecedented events taking place culminated (for us) in the cancelling of exams. So much for contingency plans! I have been amazed at how quickly everyone has adapted to new methods of working and using technology. The only 'Zoom' I knew a year ago was how to make the text on my computer screen a bit bigger to view...

It was disappointing that The Exams Office winter conferences were not able to go ahead as planned as it is always enjoyable to meet up with colleagues and be brought up to date with the latest exams news, changes and information – and to catch a glimpse of the gold jacket for the prize draw! But, as usual, The Exams Office have not let us down, and I am sure many of you will have enjoyed the [Virtual Conference](#) and watching the presentations and follow up 'Question and Answer' sessions from the various exam boards plus Ofqual, JCQ, and Juggy on behalf of The Exams Office. I am also looking forward to viewing the JCQ 'Q&A' session to be broadcast in late April which will refer to the final confirmed guidance for summer 2021 grading and awarding. If you have not managed to watch the conference yet do not despair as all information will be available on [The Exams Office website](#) until at least the end of May.

I was particularly excited to learn what new innovations The Exams Office has in store for exams officers in the coming year. For a while now there has been 'talk' of an association specifically to support exams officers rather than exam centres, and it seems that very soon it will become a reality with the launch of the National Association of Examinations Officers (NAEO). As exams officers we play a very specific and specialist role in educational establishments and it will be wonderful to have an association representing our interests to other stakeholders, offering us personal support including employment and legal advice as well as information in a range of areas including professional development and Mindfulness – it really will be a holistic approach to support. There is also a suggestion of developing a set of professional standards which help in raising the profile and status of the role and the exams officer community. We will also be offered professional support with the launch of the [Exams Officer Digital Accreditation \(EODA\)](#). I suppose it is time we took assessments as well as organising them for others! I am also keen to attend the NAEO summer conference to meet with colleagues and celebrate the achievements of exams officers. I am really looking forward to the summer to find out more details and to get signed up for (free!) membership. Information regarding the NAEO can be found on [The Exams Office](#) and [NAEO website](#).

Now for a look forward to this summer. Usually at this time of year I would be writing about planning for the forthcoming GCSE, A level and other public exams, but for the second year running we can cancel that plan. Although it is the responsibility of Heads of centre, SLT and teaching staff to lead on the grading process within centres, there will still be lots for us to think

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about in the coming weeks.

The Exams Office member message in their [April Update](#) indicates Head of centre, SLT and teaching staff roles and responsibilities, and the need for exams officers to ensure that they are aware of the final, confirmed guidance and support produced by [Ofqual](#) and [JCO](#) in recent weeks. This will be supplemented in the coming weeks by additional support materials and information from the awarding organisations.

The Exams Office collate all the latest information published by stakeholders so keep checking their [Updates page](#) and the [Articles page](#) for documents summarising the guidance for grading and awarding for General Qualifications and Vocational Technical Qualifications.

Some of us will be involved in the planning of a timeline to ensure that students and teachers get the maximum time possible for teaching and learning before any formal assessments are taken to inform final grade decisions which must be submitted by **Friday 18 June 2021**. If you are involved in this process, ensure, if you do not already do so, to request to attend Heads of Department meetings, or other meetings regarding the planning process. Even if you do not speak at these meetings you will get to find out what is planned. Sometimes SLT overlook the valuable resource, and information source, that they have in their exams officer, so you may need to remind them.

I know this will not be a comprehensive list, but these are some of the points that I think will need to be considered by centres over the next few weeks to ensure they have a comprehensive policy regarding the awarding of grades this year. All staff involved must be made aware of what is required of them and the deadlines that your centre has set.

- Decide which work will be used as assessment evidence; this should be the same for the whole cohort if possible. Have students already taken mock exams earlier in their course? Has NEA work been completed, or partially completed? Should the students take other assessments in the next month or so?
- If students will be taking further assessments, will these be using questions and mark-schemes due to be published by exam boards? If teachers create their own assessments, have they also created a mark scheme to ensure consistent marking?
- Will additional assessments be conducted by teachers in classrooms during lesson time, or (even though this is not required) in a more formal setting organised by the exams officer and supported by invigilators?
- How will your centre ensure that access arrangements students will acquire their permitted arrangement?
- How will work used as evidence for the assessment of grades be collected and stored? Will original work be gathered in and retained, or will work be copied and stored (either electronically or in hard copy)? Who will be responsible for copying work? This might be a time-consuming job. Will it be easy to access, if required, for external sampling by exam boards, or for an appeal after grades are published in August.
- How will teaching staff inform students of the work that is being used in the assessment process and on which their grade will be based? Will there be time for a discussion if a student disagrees with the evidence being used? **Teachers must NOT tell students the final grade awarded.**

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- Once teachers have gathered all the evidence and marks required to make a grade decision how will these judgements be moderated within your school? Will departments need time to run a moderation process?
- If a student has special circumstances affecting their performance how will this be taken into account when making grading judgements?
- What is the process for Heads of Department and the Head of Centre to 'sign off'/approve final decisions?
- How much time will be needed for the actual submission of grades to the exam boards - are you familiar with the submission system from last year? Will you need assistance to call over the grades as you type?
- Will you make a contingency plan in case of computer malfunctions? Is there a plan in case of staff illness, both teachers and exams officer?
- Who will publish the timeline to relevant staff? Who will enforce the deadlines? We all know someone in our centre who likes to push the envelope with regards deadlines.
- What are the arrangements for restricted release and results day(s)?
- How will the appeals process be managed?

I hope that these ideas may help you in your planning. Now this is the second year of assessed grades you are becoming experts on how this all works!

I wish you all the very best for the summer term, I hope things go smoothly for you.