

## EXAMS BLOG

### Support for exams officers

This month's blog is written by Lisa Longstaff, exams officer at Dunottar School, who considers the support available to exams officers...particularly those who are new to the role.

If you are new to the Exams Officer role...'Welcome!' Or perhaps, like me, you have been in role for a few years or more, if so...'Well Done!' These have been a tough couple of years but the network of support available has been appreciated more than ever before, at a time when we have mostly had to be reactive, rather than proactive which is the default setting for most EOIs I know! In this blog, I consider some of the support which is available to exams officers, particularly those new to the role.

The choice of **exam boards**, and their specifications, vary from centre to centre. Some Sixth Form colleges may run mainly vocational qualifications, other centres offering purely GCSEs and A levels, and some may offer a mix of these. It can seem overwhelming and bewildering at first glance.

Thankfully there is plenty of support and my first port of call is often the exam boards, also known as awarding bodies, themselves. As our schools and colleges are their 'customers', the awarding bodies appreciate that we require support in order for us to run their specifications effectively and efficiently. It is helpful and reassuring that they are available via phone, however, I must admit that I have found the AQA online chat very useful if I have relatively straightforward or simple question for which I require an answer. If my query is urgent, I will telephone the relevant awarding body and follow this up with an email, just to confirm the conversation and also to provide me with a 'paper trail' that I, and colleagues in my centre, can refer to if required.

Most awarding bodies currently run online training; at some point in the future, I hope that this will once again be offered as a face-to-face event in addition to an online session. The training is timed to relate to specific tasks, such as entries or results, and has been invaluable during the past two academic years to guide us through the Teacher and Centre Assessed Grades process. This training will often be specific to awarding body systems and specifications, but the tasks are generally common to all boards. Do search for each awarding body's *Exams Officer Updates* and sign up for these if you haven't already. Here are some useful links:

- <https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/become-an-aqa-centre/exams-officer-services>
- <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-for-you/exam-officers-administrators.html>
- <https://ocr.org.uk/administration/support-and-tools/exams-officer-update/>
- <https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/subscribe-for-updates/>

Barely a working week goes by without me referring to **The Exams Office (TEO) website**, whether to read their monthly articles, documents, blogs, or to access the Online Portal for training and/or the Exam Policy Generator Tool. Your centre is the member of TEO, but the exams officer is the main beneficiary. The depth of knowledge of the collective staff is astounding, they totally 'get' our role and its demands, having themselves gained hands on experience throughout their careers in education and exams. It is good to know that they have usually identified a potential issue/need before we do, enabling us to find the exact template or information required at the right time.

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The Exams Office, in conjunction with their training partner **Exams Training**, have continued to further develop their training for invigilators, [new and experienced exams officers](#) and [senior leaders/line managers](#), with face-to-face events and conferences, enabling us all to network further. This offering fits neatly alongside the exam boards to help us through the exams' calendar with more cohesion and a better overview. The progression to the [Policy Generator Tool](#) now provides interactive policy documents which will help save time, enabling us to produce professional policies that we know will meet the exacting JCQ requirements. Once these are set up the first time you will be able to produce updated versions annually.

If you have not yet signed up for your [local network meetings, run by OCR](#), then please do so as a priority. These continued throughout lockdowns, and it was great to 'see' each other. They give exams officers a 'voice' in a smaller group of other local exams officers, enabling us to build our support network, a great confidence boost if you are new to the role.

You may find some useful resources closer to home, if, for example, your school is part of a group or trust, then you can reach out to other exams staff within your chain of schools/colleges to share best practice/issues specific to you. This could be with queries about your MIS, or Head Office directives. You may also be able to share some of your group's policies such as safeguarding and data protection.

You may also find colleagues at your centre that can support you in other ways with their specialised knowledge. For example, you may benefit from using excel spreadsheets, perhaps you know the basics but need a refresher. Your centre may find you are not the only one needing this. Or you may decide to brief candidates using a presentation and ask for help to brush up your PowerPoint/presenting skills.

Finally, something we have all been waiting for, the [National Association of Examinations Officers \(NAEO\)](#) has arrived.

If you are new to the exams officer role, you may not realise how much this association will be valued by existing exams officers. You, the exams officer, are the member, and the membership – which is free of charge for the 2021/2022 academic year if your centre is a member of The Exams Office – remains with you if you move to a similar role in another centre.

Amongst the benefits are a programme of reward and recognition, employment rights/legal advice, a vacancies section, interview support, and a [Summer Conference](#) which we can all look forward to.

The NAEO is a Community Interest Company (CIC) - operating to benefit the exams officer community rather than private shareholders. It has been established by the founders of The Exams Office, which to me speaks volumes of the standard of operation and service which members can expect, and I am looking forward to seeing it develop over the coming years.

*Views and opinions expressed in this blog are the authors own*