

Preparing for the new academic year

After such a busy and exhausting summer exam series it would be perfectly understandable for many exams officers to look forward to a 'slower pace' of activity in the coming weeks. However, as many experienced exam officers will testify, by completing some tasks prior to the end of the summer term you will be standing yourself in very good stead ahead of the new academic year starting in September.

It should be noted that not all colleagues are employed on 'term-time only' contracts and many will be at their desks throughout the 'summer break' which is afforded to other staff within their centre.

In this article, Jugjit Chima considers eight tasks which could be undertaken in the coming weeks to review the current academic year/summer series and help ensure that you are fully prepared and 'ahead of the game' by the start of the 2022/2023 academic year.

Reviewing the 2021/2022 academic year

By undertaking a review of exams in your centre, not only will you be making your line manager and/or senior leadership team aware of how examination processes are functioning within your centre, but it is also an opportunity for you to focus upon what went well – and areas in need of improvement. You should highlight any risks which you have identified in your planning, when managing exam entries, preparing for exams and during exam time along with, if possible, suggestions on how improvement can be achieved.

Any review should include feedback from staff, invigilators and candidates to evaluate the service provided by the exams office(r) and to identify where improvements could be made and may also demonstrate how the exam budget was spent and identify an action plan for the 2022/2023 academic year.

A review is the ideal opportunity to inform the decision-makers within your centre about your continuing professional development needs, and the support you require to become more effective and efficient in your role.

JCQ centre inspection

If any areas were identified as in need of improvement during your recent JCQ centre inspection, these should be raised with your line manager (and ultimately your head of centre as it is they who have overall responsibility for exams within your centre) and addressed as a matter of urgency.

If the inspector made any verbal recommendations but these were not noted on the written inspection report, they should still be addressed as a matter of good practice and ahead of the next inspection visit.

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As part of the process of ensuring that records are archived/retained in accordance with current requirements, the end of the summer term is an ideal time to identify exams-related information/records held by the exams department and the relevant retention period. Following the identification of such materials, action should be taken at the end of the retention period and the method of disposal confirmed for information and records which are no longer required.

Exams-related policies

Although the majority of exams-related policies/procedures can only be updated in the new academic year when regulations are updated and published, there are some policies and procedures which could – possibly should, as they are related to exam time and actions undertaken during the summer series will still be fresh in your mind – be reviewed and updated by the end of the summer term. These include:

- Exam contingency plan (although a further review may need to be undertaken once 2022/2023 regulations are published)
- Emergency evacuation policy (although a further review may need to be undertaken once 2022/2023 regulations are published)
- Child protection and safeguarding policy
- Complaints and appeals procedure (although a further review may need to be undertaken once 2022/2023 regulations are published)
- Equalities policy
- Escalation process
- Lockdown policy

Information gathering

Exams officers could begin the process of acquiring exams-related information from teaching staff towards the end of the summer term. This will include the qualifications that will be examined or assessed during the new academic year and the estimated number of candidates for each.

Although many exams officers start the process of acquiring this information at the start of the new academic year, by bringing this forward to the end of the summer term you can begin to confirm if qualifications delivered in the previous academic year are continuing and identify any new or reformed qualifications. This will allow you to research updated JCQ and awarding body administrative processes and collate relevant information on key dates and deadlines when this information is published and signpost relevant centre staff to annually updated JCQ publications as these become available. Most importantly, this information will allow you to respond to any requests from awarding bodies for early information (for example, intention to enter/estimated entries etc.) and support you in starting to build your centre's annual exams plan.

Subject departments/teaching staff who fail to supply this information in the coming weeks can be followed up

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as a priority in September.

Access arrangements

Meet with your additional learning support (ALS) lead or special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) to start to identify potential access arrangement candidates for the 2022/2023 academic year. This is also an opportunity to review the implementation of access arrangements during the summer exam series, agree roles and responsibilities in relation to access arrangements and look ahead/plan for tasks such as training/updating staff who will be invigilating and/or facilitating access arrangements.

Invigilators/invigilation

Undertake a review of invigilation during the summer exam series including issues which occurred within the exam room and how they were dealt with, the performance of individual invigilators, and identify your needs for exams and assessments taking place during the 2022/2023 academic year.

If you do require additional invigilators, it is strongly recommended that you start to advertise for new invigilators as soon as possible.

Exams equipment

Undertake a 'stock check' of exams-related furniture (e.g. desks, chairs etc.) and other equipment (e.g. stationery etc.) to identify costs, availability and when you should place orders to ensure that all equipment is acquired in good time for exams and assessments taking place during the 2022/2023 academic year. You should factor in any delays due to supply shortages or whilst you submit a budget proposal which may have to be approved by your senior leadership team or the relevant individual responsible for approving such purchases.

This is also an ideal opportunity to assess your secure storage capacity following the summer exam series to determine whether additional storage may be required moving forward.

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