A V I O D I N G   L A T E   E X A M   E N T R Y   F E E S

One of the key tasks undertaken by an exams officer each academic year is to ensure that exam entries are made correctly, and within the deadline(s)…ensuring that unnecessary late exam entry fees are avoided.

As centre budgets come under increased pressure, it is more significant than ever that late exam entry fees are avoided, or at the very least, kept to a minimum.

Although there are certain circumstances where late entry or other penalty fees cannot be avoided (e.g a student enrolls at your centre after the entry deadline, a student is withdrawn or an entry has to be amended for unforeseen circumstances), there is no reason why, with good (and early) planning, an exams officer should miss an entry deadline – particularly the 21 February deadline for the summer exams series.

In this article, we consider some of the actions which exams officers can take to ensure that exam entries for the summer 2023 exams series are made accurately and by deadline.

Ensure early planning

Although the entry deadline for the summer exams series is almost three months away, consider starting to prepare for the submission of final entries as soon as possible, thus giving you plenty of time to collate and check entry information before the final entry deadline in February.

If you are new to the role, it is suggested that you read The Exams Office **A guide to managing entries.**

Exams officers should establish clear lines of communication with teaching teams (or those members of staff responsible for providing entry information) and request a regular 'exams' agenda slot at appropriate meetings (for example departmental staff meetings or head of department meetings). This is a good way of presenting information, giving the opportunity to make it clear what information is required, why it is required and when it is required.

Exams officers should:

- Provide a regular update/review of deadlines and progress towards meeting these by department/subject
- Engage the senior leadership team (SLT) to provide support in minimising the risk of late or missed entries
- Make SLT aware of the potential scale of late or other penalty fees and the support that may be needed to make sure the centre avoids them

Create a centre policy

Ideally, there should be a centre policy in place on exam entries which clearly identifies roles and responsibilities within the exam process (cycle), and refers to which centre staff are responsible for providing the exams officer with final entry information.

Setting processes

Your centre policy should outline the entry process which must be followed and highlight the internal entry deadlines which must be met regardless of external entry deadlines. There should also be confirmation of the relevant teaching teams understanding their responsibilities and how crucial it is that correct final entry information is provided to the exams officer on time and in the correct format.

In return, the exams officer must provide centre staff with information about the entry collection processes and internal deadlines. Information should also be provided on the process to deal with any non-standard entries, which could include:

- entries for candidates on the centre's roll who may be educated elsewhere or in alternative provision
- candidates who may transfer into the centre from another centre during the course of the academic year
- re-sit entries

Ensure that entry processes are easy to follow, and any internal deadlines set can be reasonably met. Plan well ahead and request that internal deadlines are included in the centre's calendar, therefore recognised as significant events in the school/college year.

Setting internal deadlines

The exams officer should set internal deadline(s) which are well in advance of external deadline(s) to allow sufficient time for entries for all subjects to be collated and processed internally.

As far as practically possible build in time for a re-check of entry information after internal processes are complete to ensure that entry information is correct prior to the deadline for final submission to the awarding body.

When submitting entry information, teaching staff should also be made aware of the awarding body deadlines for making changes to entries in terms of amendments without charge or withdrawals with a refund of entry fee.

Make requesting changes to entry information a formal and recognised process as this will provide an audit trail of what changes were requested, by whom, and when. It will also ensure that adhoc or informal requests not made via the formal process are not accepted – this should be added to the centre's exams policy.

Gather entry information

Effective information gathering on which qualifications are delivered in your centre and building an annual qualifications plan are key to helping centres avoiding late entry fees.

Once an exams officer has this information, they can research awarding body exams administration processes for each qualification and identify key deadlines for entries, fees and charges (entry deadlines, amendment and withdrawal dates, dates when late and very

late entry fees will be charged). However, exams officers should be aware that awarding body processes/deadlines may differ across awarding bodies/qualifications.

It is also essential that an exams officer keeps up to date with any education reforms or changes which may affect the qualifications delivered in their centre and potentially affect awarding body administrative processes and key entry deadlines.

Before making entries, exams officers must refer to awarding body exams administration guidance to determine how to make entries and should collate information on individual awarding body entry deadlines, fees and charges. The Exams Office provides a **Deadlines for entries, fees and charges template** to support exams officers in completing this task.

For centres using a MIS for exams administration, once the relevant basedata has been downloaded from awarding body websites an exams officer can determine how the MIS can be used to collect entry information (your MIS provider, through training/user guide, should be the point of reference for this activity).

For centres without a MIS facility, a paper/electronic form could be devised to collect entry information from teaching teams. The Exams Office provides an **External entries collection form template** to support exams officers in undertaking this task.

Candidate information

When submitting final entries the awarding body must be provided with individual candidate information which includes the personal details (name, date of birth, etc.) and the required candidate identifiers for each candidate being entered

If this is your first experience of candidate identifiers, it is recommended that you refer to the **Exams key terms glossary** to understand the terms candidate number, unique candidate identifier (UCI) and unique learner number (ULN).

Exam information (Entry codes)

Exams officers should be clear on the entry codes which need to be collected from teaching teams (unless for centres using a MIS for exams administration, teachers input their own subject entries directly into the MIS).

Refer to the individual awarding body exams administration guidance for entry code information.

Submit entries ahead of the deadline

Experienced exams officer will have considered a range of strategies to avoid late or missed entries.

The Exams Office provides **A guide to avoiding late entries for those new to the role.**

Exams officers should consider submitting entries well ahead of the awarding body entry deadline, perhaps as early as December or early in the new year. By submitting entries well before the final entry deadline allows changes (additional entries, amendments, and withdrawals) to be made even before the February deadline arrives, minimising the risk of any late or other penalty charges being incurred.

Post-entry submission: Review and monitor

Even after final entries have been submitted, keep in regular contact with teaching teams to continually review and monitor entry information in the event of any required amendments or withdrawals. Ensure that your MIS or manual system is kept up to date with any changes and that amendment submissions, which reflect these changes, are regularly made to awarding bodies.

Where an awarding body provides a window of opportunity to make amendments without charge or withdrawals with a refund of fees, ensure the deadlines are clearly identified. As these deadlines approach, undertake a further check with teaching teams to action and submit any changes by the deadline without penalty.

Conclusion

Unnecessary late exam entry fees should be avoided at all costs, and this can be achieved by following the steps detailed in this article.

However, once entries have been submitted exams officers should undertake a review of the exam entry process within their centre, keeping a track of entry fees and any other/penalty charges levied on their centre by awarding bodies. Exams officers should produce a summary as part of an end of year exams review report to their head of centre/senior leadership team.

Determine how best to present this information for maximum impact, and consider:

- reporting on cost by department/subject in terms of on-time entry fees (this demonstrates the scale of the exam fee spend)
- again, by department/subject reporting late fees, amendment fees, refunds given where withdrawals submitted by the deadline etc.
- summarising the main reasons why/if penalty fees have been incurred, for example internal deadlines not being met, internal processes not being followed, incorrect information being provided etc.
- suggesting actions that may be required to reduce the level of penalty fees in the future

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (End of November 2022)