

DECEMBER 2022

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

In our latest blog, Alexis Wragg (exams officer at Rugby School) highlights the importance of effective planning and hints and tips to ensure that all the tasks at hand are completed effectively and to deadline.

The December quote in The Exams Office diary is from A. A. Milne:

“Organising is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it’s not all mixed up”

As exams officers it is imperative that we are organised in all aspects of the role, from entries, timetabling, seating plans through to results, post results and certificates. We all know how much planning is required to make each stage of the exam process a success.

Being prepared at each key point during the year allows us to cope when the unexpected happens. For example, when a new access arrangement needs to be implemented at short notice or a late entry needs to be processed. But there are times during the year when the workload can feel overwhelming; when juggling too many jobs means you don’t know where to start. If you find yourself reacting to situations because that is all you have time to do rather than approaching them because you are ready, that is when short term and long-term planning strategies can kick into action and help to prioritise the jobs for that day, that week or that month.

Short term goals

It is important to have short term goals to focus on what needs to be completed in the immediate future. The new notepad supplied by The Exams Office as part of their dispatch this year is perfect for ticking off those jobs which need tackling. While the key tasks page in the diary helps to identify what needs to be completed that week. These tools are vital for not only prioritising jobs but also providing a well-deserved sense of satisfaction once they have been achieved and you can place a big tick in the box. But most importantly they allow you to make progress to achieve your end goals.

Long term goals

Having a long-term plan for the year helps to manage and reach important internal, centre specific key dates as well as external deadlines. The Exams Office provide an [annual exams plan](#) which can be used to build your year around. By dividing the key tasks by colour to easily identify the tasks ahead you can see at a glance which job is next. When I started using this plan a few years ago, I kept a printout on my desk and I populated and annotated it throughout the year. Only when I reached July and had the time to type it up and create a useful, live document did I realise just how much variety the role entails.

Having such a plan also allows you to identify opportunities during the year when key jobs can take place.

- When is it a good time to update policies?

- When can you review your exam procedures?
- When can you review your exam year and have time to reflect on what went well and decide upon improvements you can make for the following year?

Along with the annual exams plan, The Exams Office provide a wealth of documents to support the planning of a wide variety of tasks to be completed throughout the year. The next focus is entries and the [annual qualifications plan](#) is good for new exams officers who are yet to complete this element of the exam cycle. Or you may have already used the [information gathering form](#) to collect and collate the qualification information you need. Both are also useful for more experienced exams officers looking to streamline procedures and improve effectiveness.

The Exams Office produce a comprehensive guide to the exams year. The [guide to managing exam planning](#) takes you through the whole year providing all the links to JCQ and The Exams Office documents to make the exams officer life as easy as possible. On top of this The Exams Office provides a *Monthly Update* and *Termly Exam Checklists* all designed to take you through the exam year as smoothly as possible.

While all of these documents are designed to support and aid exams officers through the year, everybody has their own unique way of working too. Finding strategies that allow you to work efficiently will help to decrease your workload. One approach I have used when planning meetings or training events for my invigilation team is to set up the PowerPoint, I am going to use months in advance. Then, every time I think of something I want to tell them, or train them on, or find a picture I want to show them, I click on my power point and write it or save it on a slide. When I am finally ready to plan the delivery of the meeting, I have most of the information I need already, I just need to make it look presentable.

What do exams officers need to focus on in December?

- In terms of internal assessments December and January are key months for mock examinations and time will be used planning and delivering these for years 11 and 13. Return to The Exams Office November blog which focuses upon utilising mock examinations to raise the standard of invigilation within your centre and how you can make the best use of the mock examinations to develop the competence, knowledge and understanding of your invigilation team.
- JCQ set a deadline for all awarding bodies to have their basedata available to download by 24th November therefore making a start on summer 2023 entries is now possible.
- If you have students sitting exams in the January 2023 series, now is the time to complete exam room paperwork and seating plans. Be ready for the delivery of registers and exam papers and make sure a log is kept of the papers once removed from the despatch packaging as per the JCQ Instructions for conducting examinations 2022/2023 section 2.1.
- Don't forget to book your place at one The Exams Office National Exams Officer Winter Conferences.

I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

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