



NAEO Steering Group Meeting – Exams Officer Professional Standards

Date: Wednesday 21 September 2022

Time: 11.00 – 12.00

Location: 44 Holly Walk, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 4HY and Online via Zoom

Attendees:

At the office: Jugjit Chima (NAEO and meeting chair), Marcia Woods (NAEO Board Director & Steering Group administrative support)

Via Zoom: Marcia Woods (NAEO Board Director & Steering Group administrative support), Amber Patterson, Julie Vine, Samantha Burden, Jenny Kavanagh, Geraldine Jozefiak, Angela Johnson, Kerry Tweddle

Apologies: Lynne Smith, Nick Lait (JCQ).

1. Introduction

Welcome and recap

The meeting opened with a welcome to Angela who had been unable to attend our first two meetings. Angela introduced herself. She has worked as an interim EO for about 10 years. She is currently working at Capel Manor College which has provision for students aged 16 to 99. The college specialises in land-based studies – arboriculture, horticulture and animal management. It covers six sites across London and uses a variety of awarding bodies. Students also study Maths and English as GCSE or Functional Skills.

Jugjit then gave a quick recap of what we had covered in the first two meetings. The members of the group have a wide range of experience. The exams sector has been an inconsistent place for many years. Some EOs are well respected and well paid, but other are not treated well. A small percentage of SLT are not always following the rules and EOs are struggling with this. We are looking at where we want to take the role of the EO. Should it be more specialised/have professional status? Pay? Status? At our last meeting we discussed what knowledge and understanding we need. More than just JCQ rules and regulations. Angela would have a different set of rules for a different set of qualifications covered by the Federation of Award Bodies (FAB).

This meeting is the third of about five meetings. This meeting will consider skills and the following one will be about values and attributes – integrity, security. The final meeting will consider how we measure these things.

2. Skills required

Jugjit asked what kind of skills should an EO display to undertake the role? This is most important; we have lots of unrecognised skills. Outside the education sector people are impressed. When Tim Fisher became Chair of the NAEO it was quite an eye-opener for him - the skills set we have. In other sectors we might be paid a lot more. Our skills could open doors to other careers.

Julie started by listing the skills she had thought of. Patience, diplomacy, IT skills, public speaking, policy writing; TEO provides policy templates, but we need to tailor them for our centre. We need to record data



and ensure it is made accessible to the correct people and no-one else. We also need moral fortitude, especially in cases of malpractice where a parent may be saying this issue could ruin a student's life. We need to stand up for what is right by the rules.

Public speaking and confidence

Jugjit picked up on the issue of public speaking and the amount of EOs (especially those new to role), who are not aware that this will be part of their role to stand up and address meetings of staff or students. This should be included in a job description.

Kerry suggested we need bravery, to stand up to teacher who might try to overrule us. We also need calmness. We must give the impression of confidence to help candidates when things might have gone wrong. Jugjit pointed out that JCQ always say suspected malpractice – we are the people who must stay calm and find out the facts. It is a big challenge to stand up and say that the EO might be the person who has the final say regarding regulations.

Amber said there was a flip side to standing rigid to ethical values. We are the gatekeepers from exams, but we need to be approachable, providing a good exam experience for students and supporting inexperienced staff. We have a foot in both camps and need to maintain good relationships. Jugjit observed the focus on softer skills of diplomacy and being approachable to build up relationships within our centres.

A list of required skills

Geraldine told us that she had written a list of skills and went on to share them with the group.

Task Skills: administration proficiency, organisation, logistics, systems, IT, timetabling, scheduling, time management, problem solving, and subject skills.

People and Personal skills: emotional intelligence, communication, focus, appreciation, respect, patience, diplomacy, understanding, diligence, persistence, listening, and social skills.

Project management

Angela said that she was mindful that she may have missed things from our first two meetings, but she felt project management was an important skill for EOs. She had an introduction to project management in her past life, and the skills she learned have been helpful. She felt the role of EO should be separate and distinct from other roles in school, as are finance officers or business managers. We need to separate ourselves from the general population of school or college. A distinction would help to reinforce our authority. There is a fine line between the HoC and EO. For various forms, we sign in place of the HoC for-example reader and scribe cover sheets. Nothing defines the EO role. Sometimes SLT may say something, but it is not in line with the regulations and the EO would need to not be overridden.

Jugjit agreed that centres have a variety of hierarchies. He pointed out that the General Regulations for Approved Centres for this year state that the EO must be line managed by a member of SLT. The HoC signs the declaration to confirm this. The NAEO would like EOs to be on a par with business managers, we are heads of a department. Not all our members may like this, but we can't just pick the admin part of our role and focus on that. We have to have more skills moving forward. JCQ have stated the EO must be line managed by a member of SLT, but that person may object to how much knowledge they will need, alongside their other roles. The NAEO would support EOs being the gatekeepers of exams. This brings us on to the question of pay. Head of exams could be a role within a centre.



Angela has worked as an interim EO in several colleges in London where it has been usual to have an exams manager, a deputy manager as well as an EO. Some deputies have now gone, but a senior manager has been introduced. This is the problem, even if we are managed by SLT they don't have enough knowledge. Jugjit explained that it takes three to five years to really get our heads round the regulations and to say you really know what you are doing. The 'covid years' have not helped. We need to go through changes in the regulations to really understand the issues.

Angela was the only one of our group who had undertaken any training in project management. Jugjit said that he had completed a PRINCE 2 project management qualification when he worked in government. He said that on day one of the course, it didn't all make sense, but after a few days he began to get it, and it really helped with the thought processes he needed to have in place. In project management there are a series of questions you need to ask so you can judge if a project will work – deadlines, resources, contingency etc. Amber said she had done an internal course at the Home Office and the tools learned really helped when she actually managed a project.

At 11.37 Sam messaged to say her microphone was not working but she would send her thoughts via message/email.

Jugjit told us that the NAEO will be launching a platform to teach project management. Moving on, Jenny felt networking skills were important, she attends meeting to keep up to date.

Time management

Geraldine said we need administration proficiency and time management. She referred to the workshop on time management Jugjit had run at the NAEO conference. Jugjit said you cannot dictate time management, but he could provide hints and tips and tools, for example the TEO to do list pad. He then asked if you have ten tasks to do how do you pick what to do first? Geraldine immediately said deadlines. Jugjit suggested if you are not feeling mentally great it was good just to get a few straightforward tasks completed to help get motivated. Don't get distracted with trivia, but at least do something. Geraldine felt you might just continue to do easy tasks and felt you should do the worst thing first and get it completed. We need to manage our time well. Sam messaged to say part-timers need time management skills even more.

Jugjit then mentioned that if any members of the group wanted to run a workshop at the NAEO summer conference just to let him know.

Research skills and problem solving

Marcia said that she felt that research, interpreting, implementing, and disseminating information was really important. Jugjit felt that EOs should be able to set time in school each week for research to be able to keep on top of new information. Geraldine commented that awarding bodies don't make it easy to find out information on new qualifications. It takes a lot of time to find out what to do. Angela felt that it was not all on awarding bodies. EOs need to be included in discussions if teaching staff are considering new qualifications. Sometimes she knows nothing about a new qualification until she is asked to make entries. Teaching staff don't always pass information from awarding bodies on. Jugjit said this comes back to the profile and status of our role. How often do we have a new student in Year 10 or 11, but the HoY forgets to inform the EO? Angela said that in some of the centres she has worked at she has been invited to HoD meeting to contribute, but at other centres she has been treated almost like the cleaner, so cannot plan. Geraldine agreed that sometimes we are the last to know and are expected to deal with stuff at the last minute. Jenny said there were lots of managed moves at her school, so she had experience of last minute



changes. Jugjit said that in a big school with lots of changes it might suggest more pay was required. Angela said she had worked in large and small centres and felt there was not a lot of difference in terms of work. She could make bulk entries, but policies still needed writing and she had to keep up to date with the regulations. Jugjit felt there was more work, but not pro rata. Moving on again Geraldine suggested we needed skills systems, IT and online awarding body systems and software. She also felt problem solving was part of our project management role.

Training for exams officers

Angela asked if we could make EO training mandatory? Annually. Management would know it had to be done. Jugjit said the TEO would love it if all 5,000 members attended training, but they do have 2,000 people attending training and have had to put on more events. The training events would also be put online in due course. He went on to say that the expectations for invigilators is clear in black and white in ICE, but it says very little about EOs. Angela reiterated that if it is mandatory – you must attend on this day in this place management would see that they have to permit it. It states in JCQ General Regulations for Approved Centres (section 5.3) that it is the responsibility of the HoC to ensure the EO receives adequate training and support. Awarding bodies also run events, OCR run webinars as do other boards. TEO has doubled its training. However, it comes down to a centre decision. JCQ cannot require training and then not offer it for free. If we raise the profile of the EO role and had a set of standards EOs must meet and adhere to there would be more power to say to SLT I have to go to training.

Julie commented that within the exams budget (which is six-figures in many centres), £200 for EO training would be worth it. Jugjit said he had met headteachers that even questioned paying £200 for an exams clock. Some schools query the £260 cost of membership of the TEO, and finance departments cancel membership when an EO leaves, only to have to register again. He said that some schools were happy to pay £1,500 for a package to run finance training to students as required by Ofsted, but not to support EO.

Status within school

Perhaps EOs should sit on SLT like business managers and attend relevant meetings. We manage a big budget and are responsible for lots of people. Some of our colleagues would not want to sit on SLT, it is not the job they came into. Some want to be able to leave work at 3.00 pm. Angela said she does not need to sit on SLT but should attend HoDs' meetings when they are discussing new qualifications, an EO needs to know. Jugjit agreed that was a fair point. EOs are definitely HoD equivalent. If EOs are not informed the financial implications can be extreme. Jugjit attended meetings as a HoY and HoD, but not as an EO, he wondered how EOs get information. Jenny said at her previous school she was part of middle management and did go to meetings to explain exams. Jugjit said people would need to be told this is their role. We cannot blame people for not having the required skills set if they were not told when they were recruited. Kerry felt EOs need natural inquisitiveness and to get involved in lots of aspects of their centre, things are not necessarily in my remit, but I need to know. We need to know what is in the school calendar, for example sports days, field trips and work experience may clash with exams and create difficulties on the day.

3. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Monday 31 October 2022. We will discuss the values and attributes we need as EOs.

The meeting ended at 12.10

Minutes taken by Marcia Woods