



NAEO Steering Group Meeting – Exams Officer Professional Standards

Date: Tuesday 26 July 2022

Time: 12.00 – 14:00

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

Attendees:

In person: Jugjit Chima (NAEO and meeting chair), Marcia Woods (NAEO Board Director & Steering Group administrative support), Amber Patterson, Julie Vine.

Online: Samantha Burden, Jenny Kavanagh from 12.25 pm calling from Hong Kong, Lynnee Smith, Kerry Tweddle.

Apologies: Angela Johnson, Geraldine Jozefiak.

1. Introductions

Everyone introduced themselves to the other members of the group.

- Jugjit – Set up and works with TEO and NAEO, he explained their different roles. The NAEO can't stand on its own financially yet. He runs the NAEO along with others, and continues to run training for TEO among other tasks. He started out teaching History, second, then head of department, head of year, then exams manager (only one who applied for role!). Then worked for OCR and the government supported NAA. When the government stopped funding exams officer training Juggy and Jean Passmore set up TEO.
- Marcia – Works with the NAEO (director and admin for emails). Visits schools to run TEO provided invigilator training. Was an exams officer for 13 years, retired 3 years and now invigilates too.
- Samantha – based at Folkstone School for Girls, an 11-18 grammar school with a seaview. Started in 2017 and had not worked in a school before. Background in marketing, financial and insurance. Has two children so this is a perfect role to keep her brain busy. Enjoys the role and would like to broaden her horizons with the steering group.
- Amber – Started in her current role in December 2021, but worked in and around exams and education before. SEMH school, very small with 80 students from KS2 to KS4. Last year had 4 Year 11 students entered for exams. Been involved in KS2 SATS. Worked for Pearson exam operations, professional development. Worked on the security and invigilation of theory tests, and online delivery during covid. Is also a KS3 and KS4 music teacher. Invigilated and ran exams in Japan and Australia. Has lots of opinions. Thinks the EO role is as a Compliance Officer, not an admin position.
- Lynne – In role since 2007, but has worked in schools since 2000. Applied for job of data manager, received contract letter for EO, school felt she was better suited to that role, and it was more money! Loves the job. Started in a state school but now at an independent – Bedford Girls School. 400 in school, 100 Year 11 and 60-80 Year 13. School runs IB exams but she does not have much to do with them. Is 'quiet admin' of the Exams Officer UK Facebook page, responsible for 'law and order' and deleting posts. Supportive SLT, lots of IGCSE exams which are easier to administer, but



has the difficulty of pandering to parents. Pleased to be on this group and wants to improve recognition of EOs. Agreed with Amber regarding compliance role. Thinks EO role should sit between SLT and other support staff.

Juggy mentioned Lynne had provided him with notes from the Morrish Solicitors workshop at the NAEO conference which he has used to create an article for the NAEO website due to be published by the end of the week.

- Kerry – Has worked in school finance since 2004, has AFT qualification. Went part time when her daughter was born. In 2015 took on EO role, whilst continuing with finance and management accounts, when her daughter started school. 3-18 independent school in Cumbria, 50 in Year 11 and 50 in Year 13. Very supportive SLT, Kerry trained them and other teachers to invigilate this summer using TEO modules. Wants to make EO role better.
- Jenny – Works in 11-16 centre. School used to have a sixth form, but that has been dropped; school joined a trust which already had a sixth form centre. Worked in exams since 2002, before that was in a primary school setting. She has been a data manager but is just EO now.
- Julie – started her career in the city as a eurobond dealer during the 80s and 90s. Had a child then went back to the same company. Took them to a sex equality commission as not being paid as much as males. Was a horrible time. Then started working in schools and did a degree with the Open University. Has worked in sixth form, A levels, attendance and admissions in a state school. Then went to an independent school – more money and less hours. 400 girls in the school including international students. Lots of home language exams. 70 GCSE and 50 A level students.

2. Background - The reason for proposing the Professional Standards

Jugjit commented that all the applicants for the group had been female, and although a gender balance was preferable, there were no male applicants to join the Steering Group. However, as approximately 90% of EOs are female as it fits around home life perhaps this was reflective of the sector. Jugjit also posed the question/thought that if the role was more male dominated would more progress have been made with respect to EOs being classified as 'just' support staff, and that this is one of the factors which we are facing. The inaction of previous groups who had represented the exams officer community was also highlighted as a barrier to progress and achieving a more prominent status for exams officers. We need to look at the role of school Business Manager to compare ourselves with; compare the gender split, higher pay and position within SLT. In the same way EOs are the main people for exams, BMs are for finance.

There was a discussion around what the EO role has been perceived as: taken up fit in with children with school, but the group had admiration for people trying to do the job with young children. When recruiting people are not told about the late evenings, homework, which continues into holidays. Teaching staff are permitted to 'switch off' for a while during the holidays, but EOs feel pressured to continue to field enquiries from ABs. Many are underpaid and the level of responsibility is not recognised within school or general media.

Lynne mentioned when she had challenged her pay a previous HT had told her she could not have an increase as she didn't need a degree to do the job. Julie felt the EO role was more stressful than being a



eurobond dealer as we are dealing with students' futures. Sam agreed that her other roles had been easier, even with supportive SLT. Not paid enough for what we do, even if valued within school.

The technical nature of the role was also discussed, with a requirement to be aware of regulations across a range of JCQ publications, varying awarding body processes, and knowledge of specific IT systems.

3. The scope of the Steering Group - what we will look to achieve/propose and timelines

Jugjit suggested that although pay was an important point to consider the first thing we should consider was a set of professional standards for Eos to raise the profile and status of the role....and to create a workforce which is recognised for its 'professionalism'. Stage one was to agree a set of standards and let them run for a while, we could then gather feedback and tweak them as necessary.

We need to consider if job adverts would have to include the standards, would they be included in annual reviews and job descriptions?

Once we have developed a professional workforce we could hit pay. It would be difficult to establish paycales equating to teachers ones. Perhaps we could develop a minimum payscale. How would we work out paycales for a variety of types of centres?

Following a question regarding the range of steering group members, Juggy informed the group that Angela represents a college setting, and Geraldine works in a prison.

The following issues were then raised and discussed:

Whatever the size of the centre an EO has the same amount of responsibility to ensure regulations are complied with, whether for one or 100 students.

It is obvious why we want to raise the profile and status of EOs. Juggy has spoken to awarding bodies and JCQ, Ofqual and the DfE. All these exams stakeholders are supportive and would back it.

The more professionalised the role is, the more professional and well-run exams will be.

Looking at other organisations that have set up standards we need to consider what is required.

Every job needs knowledge, a set of skills (for example people, time and task management) EOs have got to comply with a variety of regulations contained in various documents, ICE, General Regs, Malpractice. We need to know the rules, have skills, and stick to a set of values regarding integrity – this could help manage 'pushy parents'.

4. Future meetings/attendance/minutes

This steering group has about 6 months to come up with a set of standards. We can launch them in January to May 2023 with a view to implementing them in September 2023. We could then review them after a year.

The plan for the steering group is to hopefully meet once a month, Juggy will come up with an agenda for discussion points. It may be that not everyone can attend every meeting, but that will be okay. We will need to consider knowledge, skills and attribute, and agree an end date. We can allocate an area for discussion for each month.

Marcia will create minutes of each meeting, which Juggy will check and distribute to the group.

Juggy will begin work now on a paper which will be finished at the end of our six month deadline. This will set out the agreed standards.

5. The main tasks/responsibilities of the exams officer role

This was our discussion area for today's meeting. Discussions were wide ranging but covered the following:

- Co-ordinating and managing the 'exams cycle'.
- Liaising with a wide range of people, staff (SEN, HoDs), external agencies (ABs, JCQ), students, parents. We could think of about 17 stakeholders including staff from HoDs to reception and site staff, Parcellforce, ABs, students and parents. EOs have to liaise with everyone.
- Communications
- Knowledge of regulations
- Project management – NAEO are working on a skills assessment platform in conjunction with Surpass to create the EODA, project management would be one area of assessment.
- We discussed the issue of malpractice – a good centre would be open to reporting students or themselves as a way of raising standards from the top down. Standards mean EOs can challenge inappropriate behaviour or malpractice; EOs would have a responsibility to report malpractice confirmed by the standards.
- One issue at the moment is that people don't know what EOs do – don't always recognise the difference from the school admin team and data manager.
- Often the HoC can be inexperienced and not realise the issues involved with exams – even though they sign to acknowledge their responsibility, really they are relying on the expertise of the EO.
- Exams results are number one for a centre, they want to be high on performance tables, but the centre does not always recognise the value of the person responsible for exams. Everyone has to have complete confidence in the EO.
- EOs need technical knowledge – specification codes, NEA for subjects. All jobs have some element of administration, but the EO role is definitely not only admin. To be compliant we need technical knowledge of all the regulations, storage room requirements, IT skills.



- The education sector needs to respect the profile and status of EOs. When an experienced EO leaves a centre that centre goes from low risk to high risk of malpractice (special measures in Ofsted terms)
- We discussed the notice period for most EOs. Usually only have to give 1 month's notice which does not allow time for succession planning and a decent hand-over. Would 3 months notice raise our profile?
- The EO has a pastoral role too. Dealing with issues arising from AAs and mental health issues. Home invigilation is on the rise. Even if SLT are supportive we often need to speak to parents as we have the technical knowledge. This is the same for malpractice issues.
- We need to have knowledge of safeguarding – home invigilation – are we putting invigilators at risk?
- EO is definitely a management role; admin staff are given tasks to do, whereas we manage our own work load, as well as an invigilation team. Could be responsible for recruiting (need to be aware of safer recruitment standards). Need to deal with issues as they arise on exam days.
- EOs need time to read and assimilate all exam regulations, so that we can advise HoC and others. This takes time and should be allocated in the autumn months when EOs are supposed 'to have nothing to do'.
- Need to consider that these standards may put some people off the role, those that see it as just a job and then want to get off home. Therefore we need to be aware of going in too hard too fast.
- Amber told the group she had been headhunted for her current role and was able to negotiate a salary to suit her. If we are able to raise the profile of EOs this could become the norm. School will begin to chase the best people, this might start in the independent sector, but would have to spread to the state sector too. Higher status and salary could be linked to an extended notice period. We will include a question regarding notice period in the NAEO Autumn survey.
- We felt that the SENDCO and Business Manager roles are good comparisons for EO. All these roles have delegated responsibilities.
- We did then discuss pay again. Pay is critical. A few years ago an EO post in Barnsley was advertised at £12,000 per annum. You could get a job in a supermarket for that rate and it would be a lot less stress. From a centre point of view if they advertise a very low salary they will get people with a low skill set applying. Higher pay with attract better skilled people.
- We then discussed the fact that many EOs work over their hours, but they are not always paid for this extra work or allowed TOIL. In schools there has been a culture of not claiming expenses for training courses. We need to consider how we value our time. People are not given time to produce policies, for example.
- A set of standards should be welcomed by the ABs as it should mean less questions directed at them if EOs had a thorough knowledge of the regulations and knew where to check for answers.



- Juggy told the group that when he was at the DfE they mapped out exactly what the role entailed. Juggy would like to revisit this as it was last done 15 years ago.

6. Next meeting - confirm date and focus area (What should be included within a set of Professional Standards) (all)

We agreed the date of the next meeting as Wednesday 31 August 2022 from 12.00 to 2.00 pm.

The focus of the meeting will be knowledge and understanding.

It was agreed that this was a good time to be working on professional standards, particularly after covid and TAGS and CAGS – a re-set. With discussion regarding online delivery of exams happening, change is coming and we need to be prepared.

Juggy requested that members of the group have a think about knowledge and understanding to be able to discuss at next month's meeting. He did not want to ask people to spend time writing ideas down (unless they wanted to), as this group was not intended be too onerous for members.

The meeting closed at 2.00 pm.

Minutes taken by Marcia Woods