



NAEO Steering Group Meeting – Exams Officer Professional Standards

Date: Wednesday 31 August 2022

Time: 12.00 – 14:00

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 Amber Patterson, Julie Vine, Samantha Burden, Jenny Kavanagh, Geraldine Jozefiak, Lynne Smith (from 12.30 pm)

Apologies: Angela Johnson, Kerry Tweddle, Nick Lait (JCQ).

1. Introduction

General conversation on results/post-results summer 2022

The meeting opened with a general discussion regarding results and post-results.

Jugjit started by asking the members how the summer season, and particularly results and post-results, had gone. He told us he had been in contact with Ofqual and JCQ and said that there was not just one single reason for issues this summer. Some centres do not seem to have had any issues and others have had real issues to deal with. The awarding bodies do have questions to answer. He asked if the missing grades were mostly for BTECs and Cambridge Nationals?

Samantha and Julie reported that they mainly had issues with AQA results and Q codes. It took seven or eight days for Q codes to be replaced with grades. Jenny also received Q codes and commented on the number of emails sent by awarding bodies after centres has broken up for the summer holidays. Amber, as EO in a very small specialist centre, said her results days were pretty smooth sailing. Geraldine, as EO in a prison, does not use a lot of standard boards and so did not experience results day problems. She uses a lot of on-demand qualifications.

Jugjit explained that if he received questions from the media or awarding bodies he may ask the group members for assistance as they have had experience themselves. He mentioned that there seemed to be issues arising every week, e.g. exam labels, downloading exam papers. The awarding bodies have had a nightmare this year. Q codes signify that information is missing.

The issues with BTEC and Cambridge Nationals (Pearson and OCR) may have been because some of the assessments took place during Covid and some of those assessment marks should have been used for final grades but had not been submitted by centres. The OCR system could have been better, new EOs did not always understand what was happening, some SLT were not supportive and subject teachers were not always passing on information to EOs to register students. Some students are still awaiting results. It is very easy to bash the awarding bodies, but in the case of AQA it is very difficult to defend them, particularly issues with Centre Services. Samantha told us that she had checked some of her Special Consideration



requests, which had been approved, but not applied. She had to go back to the exam boards to inform them of this.

Exams officer contracts/working hours

Jugjit then introduced a discussion about EOs working during their holiday. Those on term time only, or term time plus x number of weeks contracts, should not be expected to be checking emails if they are on leave. However, the emergency contact was not always available, and teachers were not necessarily available, information requested may not have been readily available if it was stored at the centre and the EO working from home. Jugjit said that in the future we would need to look at contracts as part of our work. Jenny had sent Jugjit an example of a contract as part of a consultation package and it was ridiculous how EO pay was calculated. Term time plus two-week contracts might not be good enough for the work expected. Amber told us she had been given a new contract, having been on supply, hers was for term time plus two weeks, but it was not prescriptive, and she had spent time during the summer dipping in and out of her school (three weeks of 4 or 5 hours per day). She also said she would be working during the Easter holiday. She commented that EOs were not helping by logging-in and working from home. They needed to make themselves visible at their centre so others could see the amount of work involved.

Jugjit asked what the group thought about this issue. Does the EO role sit outside other roles? Would full time with 28 days annual leave for example be better? Or do EOs with children prefer term time only? Or term time plus 2/3 weeks? Marcia asked if EOs are their own worst enemies by logging-in and dealing with emails whilst on leave? Julie told us that her principal wanted parents' emails answered within 24 hours, so she did need to check. Jugjit asked if people were checking emails. He did not think teachers would be checking during their break. EOs are picking up work during other breaks too – preparation at Easter, results and post-results in summer. Regulations state we must give candidates information regarding post-results; when is that done? Samantha told us she is on an annualised contract, as she is part-time with children, but she is doing more and more hours. She does have days where she decides she is not going to check her emails, and it should not be expected on the salary she is on.

Representation from the prison sector

Geraldine was then asked to introduce herself as she had missed out on introductions from our first meeting. She explained that she had work at HMP Norwich for 12 or 13 years and had been an EO for about 7. She is also working on articles and workshops on Mindfulness for NAEO and TEO. Her situation is very different from others, with a high turnover of students. She runs 4 or 5 exams every week by herself. She is considered admin which undermines her role and is expected to do filing and phone calls for others. She loves what she does and is very keen that the EO profile is raised in general. We are not appreciated. Geraldine explained that in a prison, education is second fiddle to security, and they are continually reacting to circumstances. CCTV was everywhere, so invigilators could be observed in their duties.

Jugjit explained that he wanted Geraldine on the Steering Group to represent the outliers – prisons, hospital. Amber represents specialist centres. The other group members then briefly introduced themselves to Geraldine. These introductions are recorded in the minutes of our first meeting held on 26 July 2022.

The exams officer role

Jugjit then stated that people in schools consider exams to be very important, but that is not reflected in the treatment of EOs. People are really interested in the exam results. However, pressure is now being put on senior leaders with responsibility for exams to have knowledge of exam rules, as per this year's regulations.



Once our professional standards are in place, we can distance ourselves from admin roles. He feels that our role will be enhanced if SLT have to be involved and recognise the work carried out by EOs. He is trying to link the NAEO with a trade union, possibly NEU. Unison have not impressed. He is also trying to get NAHT and ASCL involved, then we may get the pay and conditions we deserve.

Lynne said that she had had good results days, a couple of Q grades, but nothing eventful. She then explained that an office manager job was advertised at her school before the summer break, it was more or less at her starting salary. She complained to school and was told EO is no different to admin role.

Jugjit explained that the Covid 'aftershock' has been difficult, but Ofqual wants to listen. The awarding bodies need to give us answers. He said that he had ignored calls from the press as he felt they were 'after' AQA and he can't add anything to the conversation at present. The awarding bodies will get fined by Ofqual for this year.

Moving on, Jugjit explained our Standards are not totally about pay. We need to make sure our terms and conditions are recognised as different to other roles. EOs work to a different cycle. While others are looking forward we are still looking back too.

2. Knowledge and understanding

We then moved on to the focus of meeting – the knowledge and understanding required to perform the exams officer role.

Julie said EOs have to have a certain knowledge and that we need proof that you can't do this job without this knowledge. Perhaps have 'registered Eos'? We then went on to discuss what knowledge was required.

Jenny started by saying we need knowledge of the qualifications, different levels.

Induction

Lynne said we need to know where to go for knowledge, e.g., booklets produced by JCQ. She mentioned that when she started her current role she was sent to a completely empty office, no intro pack, no documents, nothing, and nobody else in school knew what an EO did either. SLT needs to make available an induction pack with JCQ regulations. Jugjit mentioned that TEO has an online induction pack for EOs. Amber said she could not have done her job without the TEO induction, but lots of EOs don't know it exists. We need to know who's who in Ofqual and JCQ and awarding bodies. SLT are not likely to know.

Support/mentoring

Geraldine felt that reading a handbook was not the same as having a mentor to show you and guide you to the handbook. Samantha said that her husband work in tax within a private company. Both of them need to have knowledge and read documentation. She feels they have similar roles, but her husband earns about three times as much as her. Most of our information is in our heads, when she started she researched and asked other EOs. We don't get paid for the knowledge in our heads. EOs help new EOs via forums, and the Exams Officers UK Facebook group has been really helpful. Jugjit explained that from 2011 to 2013 the government wound down, and then got rid of, the Field Team of Centre Support Officers (CSO). There had been over 30 of them. Jugjit, Jean Passmore, and Jane who now organises training events were all part of that team. Jenny explained that centre support officers were there to come out and visit new EOs and help



via the phone as well as at conferences. They offered one-to-one support. Jugjit explained that they would offer support for a full year. The cost was about £4 or 5 million per year. The Centre Support was planned to leave the arena after about five years and the Exams Officers Association (EOA) was meant to take over this role, with government funding. The EOA was also disbanded. This type of support is not going to come back. It created centres who delegated support for EOs to the government. There was no support in centres for EOs. A buddy/mentor is a good idea.

Notice period

If the notice period for EOs was changed to 3 months, handover support for new EO could be provided by the leaving EO. This cannot be done with 1 month notice and EOs on admin contracts. Lynne told us her notice period in an independent school was 3 months and had been 2 months in her state school. The problem would be if you wanted to move out of exams, a new employer might not be willing to wait 3 months for you. Samantha said that a 3 month notice period was pretty standard in the private sector. Jugjit said that if the notice period was 3 months it should be reflected in pay. Samantha mentioned that she liked working term time only and would probably move back into marketing if she had to go full time.

Hours and remuneration

Julie mentioned that during the summer EOs were working 10/12-hour days and they should get TOIL. Jugjit agreed that EOs need to get TOIL if they worked over their hours, but what about the rest of the year? Hours need to be spread. Perhaps it should be changed to a full-time manager role with 28 days holiday and a starting salary of £25,000 going up to £32,000 or £35,000. It may be that lots of EOs would want to leave for a lesser role. This is a good time as there is a shortage of labour and we could demand more pay. Geraldine asked how EOs and data managers are valued? Jugjit told how a teacher had contacted him and asked what he should ask for doing an EO role as well as teaching? Centres should pay for experience, not two jobs for the price of one.

School/Academy trusts

Amber introduced the ideas of school trusts which are meant to be reducing costs and sharing experience, but she has never seen an advert for a senior exams manager to work across a trust to lead on training and delivery of exams to whole trust. She felt they should be paid £100,000 per year. Lynne countered that we would still be on £25,000 pa for doing the work. Jenny said her trust was going through all roles at the moment and were looking at data managers at present. Jugjit thought that a lot of trusts were looking to cut costs. He spoke to a headteacher recently whose EO and SLT had left. She wanted to do online invigilator training as her trust would not let her do other training. Some trusts are keen on training but pass responsibility on to TEO.

Ofsted

Geraldine asked about Ofsted. She said her centre were due an Ofsted observation, but exams would not be observed. She said she had never had a JCQ inspection due to security issues. Jugjit said that Ofsted's focus seemed to be more upon exam results rather than the running of them. Lower results could trigger an inspection, but if they came in what would they have to observe of exams? Ofsted say exams are JCQ's remit.



Knowledge required by exams officers

Going back to the knowledge required, Jugjit summarised – knowledge, induction, exams cycle. Amber felt technical knowledge was vital, understanding MIS, awarding body websites, DfE sites. EOs need daily tech literacy, and to become the point of knowledge.

Lynne said we need to be subject advisors and have knowledge of specifications, NEA and other assessments; what is needed to get a qualification for each awarding body. Julie mentioned that EOs are expected to know the minutiae of specifications, for example what is the word count for an NEA? Jugjit felt that EOs should tell the teachers to find that information themselves – they should be aware of the specification they are teaching. EOs get lots of questions regarding specifications or AAs – seen as a point of contact for everything. We need to avoid that, especially when asked for this by highly paid people. Samantha said she would sign-post her teachers but wouldn't do the job herself. Jugjit said SLT should set the standards, telling teachers to know their own specification. SLT with a working knowledge of exams should realise this is not an EO job. We need to agree minimum expectations, if an EO wants to read specifications, fine. Some of the group said teachers will say it is not their job to know exam codes. Jugjit said when he was an exams manager he told HoDs to check codes, it was an expectation, JCQ would say should. Julie felt some teachers could be obstructive, but HoC or SLT should offer support.

Jugjit said knowledge of MIS was really important as was navigating websites. He felt that an EO should spend up to half a day per week, navigating awarding body/JCQ/Ofqual websites to keep up to date with information and where to find it again.

Geraldine agreed that the tech side of things was important, especially with more and more online testing. Jugjit mentioned that Dr Jo Saxton, Head of Ofqual had spoken about online testing. He has been in contact with Surpass as TEO is planning to use their platform. Surpass felt that invigilators needed more training as that was where the difficulties arose administering exams. Lynne disagreed – the Cambridge Assessment system was very bad, they had been surprised by the number of people logging on to sit university admissions test, but they knew how many were entered.

Samantha said that AQA know they have a problem with the Centre Services website but are blaming EOs for issues. Jugjit said it is also an issue that DfE has limited records (email or phone) of contacts within school, so, historically, many pieces of information go through the EO – please pass this on to HoD, HoC etc. They know EOs are conscientious and will do the job, but this places additional burden upon exams officers.

Samantha felt that ensuring EOs have knowledge of people – students, especially those with AAs, and invigilators – making sure they have training and knowledge of students as required. No other HoD do so much recruiting. Need to manage and motivate invigilators. We are like event managers or wedding planners. Julie mentioned that if we have a problem on an exam day, we have to solve it immediately.

Jugjit then pointed out that we had not really mentioned the ICE book yet. Do EOs take this as a given? Do we need some sort of certificate to confirm our knowledge of JCQ regulations is up to date? Lynne asked if we needed some sort of record of how our skills develop – start off by reading JCQ books, qualified when ticked all boxes. Then a rolling tick box to confirm we are keeping up with changes. Samantha thought a framework should be the JCQ documents, for example we manage students within the framework of regulations. Jugjit suggested we need to have a tick box to confirm we are knowledgeable on regulation changes.



In the ICE book this year it states that invigilators need to have competence. We discussed what competency implies. A skill set, to put knowledge into practice. EOs specialism is knowledge of regulations. For example, on results day EOs have knowledge and understanding of results and post-results. How do we manage students/parents/time? Using TEO Exams Officer Digital Accreditation (EODA) experienced EOs can prove to their line manager that they have knowledge and experience. Geraldine felt that knowledge and competency are different. Jenny told the group that she did the L4 BTEC in exams management, which has now been discontinued. The EOA had set up several BTECs for exams staff. Maybe from Professional Standards we can get a qualification. Theory and knowledge, but we need to be able to apply it. Lynne felt we were discussing attributes, but we need to tie them to standards.

Jugjit asked us again what we considered to be knowledge standards?

Lynne suggested we must be proficient in MIS, using exams websites. A centre needs to ensure training is provided and that EO can prove they can do the things required. Need a set of knowledge we have to acquire before we meet standard. Jugjit suggested line manager could agree proficiency before it is ticked off. Lynne felt there should be a level playing field and everyone should start at the bottom and work their way up. Jenny felt that there was knowledge required before being employed by a centre – managing a budget, staff, data.

Julie feels this an invisible job, but if it goes wrong there are cost implications. Need EOs who know what they are doing, people who run schools are looking at money. Jugjit commented that we need to keep updated, if MIS is updated we need to keep up-to-date, online exams we need to know what to do. We need evidence of competency; if we attend a course or webinar need line manager to sign it off. Lynne said SLT should be effective support for EO and receive training. We are improving calibre of EOs coming in and helping established EOs to show their status. We need goals and then ways to ensure we reach goals.

Verifying knowledge and understanding

Jugjit summarised that new EOs need induction and asked how established EOs verify their current knowledge. A statement to say what people will adhere to and will do. Lynne suggested core standards proved, required standards proved, and then advanced standards. Jugjit felt we should keep to two standards. JCQ inspection report is pass or fail. We need to come up with a list of knowledge that centres need to approve. It was then suggested that EOs sign a statement every year. What would be in that statement? Could it be in NCN declaration signed by HoC?

The impact/influence of this Steering Group

Geraldine asked what the process for the group was down the line. Jugjit explained we would have two other meetings to discuss skills, then values and attributes. Jugjit would then produce a draft document for the group to review at a further meeting. The document would also be presented to awarding bodies, JCQ and Ofqual for their input and support. This would lend weight to ask the DfE to incorporate and then publish our standards. Following on from the Malpractice Commission and Report published in 2019, several recommendations have now been included in the ICE book. Could be that Ofqual strongly recommend that EOs should adhere to standards. We could then go to unions to say we want more money. Starting pay, increments and possibly advanced skills EOs

It might be possible to start a qualification, with a portfolio, for EOs. Lynne asked if Pearson would revive the EOA BTEC? Jugjit thought they would consider this, but there may be competition for the qualification. Awarding bodies need us to be competent in our role and working to the highest possible standards for their



benefit too. Amber said they have a vested interest in EO high standards. Amber then said that JCQ were not big in her centre – just another framework among many – BTEC, functional skills and ELC. Jugjit explained that JCQ is the umbrella for 5 or 6 awarding bodies, and other awarding bodies quite often refer to ICE too. Not all centres do GCSE or A levels. There is the Federation of Awarding Bodies and other qualifications.

Final comments

In terms of a gold standard JCQ is it. 10 to 12,000 worldwide schools have lower standards, but dealing with UK qualifications they must follow the JCQ standards. Amber felt that in order to get centres to comply with standards you would need to get the awarding bodies to require EOs to comply with the standards. HoC declaration could confirm the EO is meeting the standards. Samantha observed that there is more regulation of invigilators than EO in ICE.

Jenny thought there should be training for SLT as well as EO and invigilators, Jugjit observed that training standards are very loose at the moment. He also observed that some EOs may not want these standards and we will need to make difficult decisions.

Lynne had to leave the meeting at 2.00 pm due to a phone call.

Samantha asked about the turn-over of EOs at present, we seem to be losing lots of good EOs, and it seems more unsettled on the forums at present. Jugjit said NAEO would be running the annual survey in October, but this does not always pick up new EOs as they don't always know about it. He had noticed new names asking questions regarding results days on the Exams Officer UK Facebook group. Sam thought even experienced people were asking questions on FB. Jugjit then reminded us that OCR do have a field team offering help to EOs. However, AQA support has been really cut back. Sam told us that AQA has contacted her SLT for view on Centre Services rather than her as the EO user. Jugjit said that Phil Bridgehouse at AQA was very good, but now AQA does not seem to have named support for EOs.

3. Next meeting

Jugjit will arrange the next meeting. Following the meeting, 21 September (11am-12noon) was agreed. The focus of our discussion will be skills required of an EO.

The meeting closed at 2.08 pm.

Minutes taken by Marcia Woods