



NAEO Steering Group Meeting – Exams Officer Professional Standards

Date: Monday 31 October 2022

Time: 11.00 – 12:00

Location: Online via Zoom

Attendees:

Jugjit Chima (NAEO and meeting chair), Marcia Woods (NAEO Board Director & Steering Group administrative support), Lynne Smith, Amber Patterson, Julie Vine, Samantha Burden, Jenny Kavanagh, .

Apologies: Geraldine Jozefiak, Angela Johnson, Kerry Tweddle

Welcome and general discussion

Jugjit opened the meeting by explaining that although we are considering the final aspect of our proposed professional standards today, he intends to keep the steering group 'live' so that he can ask the group members for assistance as and when required. For example, the group was asked to provide information regarding how their invigilators were paid in order to provide information to Morrish Solicitors for them to write an article regarding the outcome of the Harpur Trust v Brazel legal case concerning holiday pay. There are several outcomes from this ruling, for example at Lynne's centre invigilators work for a season and are then given P45s, they are then interviewed again and re-recruited; another solution would be for invigilators to become self-employed and submit invoices for their hours worked. Lynne's centre has a very detailed knowledge of this case as they are a Harpur Trust school. This really is an issue for HR/Finance, but exams officers can read the article on the NAEO website and pass the information on to their HR/Finance department <https://www.thenaao.org/articles/article.aspx?storyID=90>

There may be other situations where help from serving exams officers is required, for example to check through ICE for things that appear ambiguous – the use of a mobile phone for a sole invigilator – should this be clarified to cover invigilators who need to summon help in general? There was a minor change made to this year's ICE booklet in October regarding bilingual dictionaries.

Amber told the group that she has set up a Facebook group for exams officers in SEN schools as they have particular issues to discuss. Amber is fortunate to be a dedicated exams officer, which is unusual in an SEN school. One issue that seems to be coming up is the change to ICE regarding teaching assistants working one-to-one with candidates in exams. JCQ has used the term TA in ICE but this may need clarifying in future. Jugjit mentioned that in a poll he took at a training event in Manchester recently, 16% of the delegates were from SEN schools.

Professional Standards

Jugjit told the group that when he has spoken to JCQ about our proposed professional standards they have responded by asking what the NAEO wants from them, Jugjit has asked them to support the standards. Ofqual are big fans of the professional standards idea, and DfE are getting closer. Jugjit hopes that we can launch a non-mandatory set of standards and then move to making them mandatory.

In our previous meetings we have discussed the knowledge and skills required of an exams officer. One way to test knowledge will be the Exams Officers Digital Accreditation (EODA) which will be launched in time for the TEO conferences in January/February. The testing of skills will be a big project. Jugjit is commissioning a company to develop online assessments for skills such as people management. This could lead to a qualification in the next three years. Exams Officers will be able to gain skills to help in terms of their wider career development and will have evidence of these skills. Another area for development would be project management with a particular focus on exams officers.

Amber told the group that she had been approached by data science friends as the DfE has realised that there are lots of under-skilled/under-employed people. The DfE is making a lot of funding available for people to access skills boot-camps. Justify a need to the DfE and they may well pay for training. Lynne said that she was doing a course run by NCFE regarding cyber security. There could be space for an exams officer training course to be funded. Jugjit said this is where we are falling down; we don't always look at the wider picture. He felt that a previous qualification for exams officers run by the Exams Officers Association may not have been pitched correctly. We need to focus on skills that can also be used outside the exams office world for example project management, but when considering areas to look at for example the scope of the project or contingency it could be focussed on the exams officer role. This would be a big project to come where this group could be involved as a sounding board for ideas. The group may also be of use if the NAEO is approached by the press, for example the BBC or Schools Week.

Focus of the meeting for today – Values and Attributes

Jugjit explained that we are creating a set of standards which will set out the knowledge an exams officer requires and will provide ways to prove this. It will be a journey to acquire skills. We also need a set of values to set out what we represent and are about – our job. Teachers have a set of values, with learners at the centre and good quality teaching.

What are our values?

Samantha said that she had asked this question of her HoC before our meeting today. He came up with organised, and caring and compassionate. Samantha felt that this was important as we have growing numbers of students needing access arrangements, and/or suffering with anxiety. She felt people attributes are important. Samantha also felt we need bravery to be able to uphold certain rules and go against colleagues when necessary.

Julie thought integrity was important. She had heard exams officers described as 'gatekeepers' dependable and reliable. Lynne did not like the word 'gatekeeper' as she felt that SLT sometimes pushed their responsibilities on to the exams officer – relying on the exams officer to uphold the regulations by themselves. Jugjit said we need to consider integrity in the context of our job. We need to be confident that a candidate's performance – what they achieve in that exam - represents what that candidate knows. Education is the second biggest export in the country because the integrity of our exams system is high quality.

We have to consider security too. We need to drive standards, but we don't want to force people to sign up to our standards. An interesting point was raised that invigilators have to sign a document declaring any malpractice against them, but exams officers are not required to sign anything. Invigilators *have* to be trained as required in ICE. Exams officers don't have to have any verification, so exams officers are taken on to do a job but sometimes they cannot do it. Jenny agreed some exams officers cannot cope with the role. We need a set of standards that people can see and discuss at interview. Teachers have an NQT year, guidance and support from their school and university. Exams officers can come to a centre with nothing: no support from SLT, trade body or union. If SLT are poor where does an exams officer go for help? Jenny explained that she is on her third new SENCO and she is having to guide her SENCO and point out the access arrangements book. The SENCO is relying on other staff to teach her. Julie said that a level playing field is required for students with access arrangements, but there it is not level between schools.

Jugjit highlight an article published on the NAEO website today 'Planning for the summer 2023 series – actions which need to be taken by key stakeholders' <https://www.thenaeo.org/articles/article.aspx?storyID=92>

This highlights what JCQ and Ofqual etc are expected to do. JCQ has started this by saying that SLT line managers must have a working knowledge of exams. TEO needs to help SLT line managers as they should be mentors for the exams officer. Line managers need to meet with new exams officers and provide an induction programme. JCQ have said that exams officers have got to be line managed by SLT, and it is hoped that awarding bodies will not 'dilute' this requirement in the coming years. If managed by SLT exams officers are the same as heads of department and have a means to feed into SLT. JCQ has opened the door.

Our statement

The whistle blowing policy is huge coupled with our 'statement'. We can say "I don't have an opinion, but the whistle blowing policy and the standards say I *have* to give you this information". Like an HR or business manager, with knowledge and skills: you must do certain things.

Lynne asked will there ever be a requirement to tell NCNR when an exams officer leaves or is employed? At present no-one is accountable. Is there anything in the pipeline for an exams officer register? Jugjit said at the moment the simple answer is no. There is nothing behind the register. Once our standards are launched, they could have a register of exams officers and NCNR could ensure that exams officers are buddied up and pointed towards support. TEO would be happy to do this. The NCNR has details of the HoC and SLT line manager, next they could ask who the exams officer is and make it clear school need to inform them when a new exams officer is recruited. In the past the NAA would look out for advertisements etc to try to target their support. A new improved system of exams officer registration would help awarding bodies to target support.

Jugjit said as a line manager he would be desperate for support for a new exams officer, the register would trigger that and put pressure on SLT so they could take it to unions for support. When the NCNR has the name of the line manager they could write to ask who is the exams officer and do they need help?

Amber said new exams officers should be going through induction, NCNR could say they would like to centre to explain what their on-boarding process is. Jugjit said he was making a note to email OCR (who manage the NCNR) to ask if OCR/NCNR could email SLT line managers – if your exams officer is new you need to help them, don't ignore your experienced exams officer, but support your new one.

Lynne asked if TEO could put out a blog for new exams officers – the old exams officer could pass this information on. Jugjit explained that in September the articles and blogs on the website are all geared towards new exams officers. TEO phone staff have a script with five things new exams officers should do – this signposts to the articles and networking and planning.

Jugjit said that a national exams officer pay scale is very difficult, but these standards are so important, we need to get in the face of SLT to get the message across that exams officers are not support staff or admin. So back to values – JCQ have opened the door to exams officers signing a document agreeing to five or six values. Jenny suggested that problem solving, decision-making, dealing with difficult situations and affective communication should all be included. Other values suggested were honesty, confidentiality (data protection is a big part of our work), reliability, integrity and security. Jugjit told us we need a short sharp statement – these are our values.

Amber thought we should include 'unafraid to challenge power'. This is the first step in empowering people. Powerful people are answerable. Samantha said that we are empowered by SLT, but we might also need to challenge SLT. We need to focus on students to create a level playing field. The experience of students should be level across all schools. Jugjit said that the NAA had a phrase 'we have to adhere to the best possible environment to allow the candidate to perform to the best of their ability'. Samantha said that we have work to protect students and staff from committing malpractice. Julie thought we are the hub in the middle. Jugjit again likened us to heads of department - if the head is cut off there is chaos. Samantha said if the students were not there, we would not have a job, so we need to work to ensure/prevent students and staff from engaging in unintentional or intentional malpractice.

Jugjit summed up our thoughts so far on values – integrity, support, the kind of person who performs to the best of their ability and has up-to-date knowledge and skills.

Lynne said we need to be value for money, avoid late fees and ensure we bring best value for money from our position. We can do the job badly and cost money. Jugjit said easing pressure on a centre budget, for example ensuring deadlines are kept. This can act as a kick-back against HoDs querying early deadlines. Professional standards give us back-up. We are protecting the standards. Samantha felt standards would protect the students too, more planning and early deadlines would protect students from our stresses.

If we have values every time we are challenged we can say "I am not being a pain, I have to sign to standards and follow them". If there are issues, we can say, "I have to protect the standards" – like teachers do. When we are questioned



we can refer back to the values in the standards, for example if we were questioned on whether we have to report malpractice.

Jugjit asked if there were any more comments, but there were not. He explained that the next meeting on 28 November would be short, possibly 30 minutes, this would be a chance for us to make any final comments after reading the minutes. Jugjit would then have about two weeks to complete his report before presenting it to the group at our meeting on 14 December. The report would then be sent to JCQ and Ofqual for comment. Jugjit could then make mention of our progress at the TEO conferences in the new year.

Lynne asked if JCQ and/or Ofqual are required to action the standards? Jugjit explained that they are keen on this project. Ofqual's job is to protect the exams system. He is trying to steer the DfE to understand we have a world leading exams system, so we want their approval. We would also want the unions to endorse the standards. It would then put pressure on at centre level to encourage the use of a template job description for exams officers. The standards would lay out to centres what we support. The exams organisations know the standards are coming. The kick-back might come at HoC level, but they sign a document stating they will support their exams officer.

So, final comments for 28 November, Jugjit will then write his report and make recommendations, like the chair of the Malpractice Commission, John Dunford, did. Jugjit is the chair of our Professional Standards Steering Group. Following the report and recommendations, we would put the standards in place and then review what has happened after a year, for example is the recommended job description being used in all centres?

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Monday 28 November 2022 from 11.00 am to 12.00 pm.

We will make final comments on what we have discussed so far.

The meeting ended at 12.06 pm

Minutes taken by Marcia Woods