

### **I'm already planning for the new academic year....!**

One of the keys to success in this job is forward planning. The current academic isn't finished, yet I am already looking ahead to 2017/18.

With results days and information for staff and candidates about post-results services almost sorted, I have already started to focus upon the 2017/18 academic by beginning the process of gathering information from subject leads.

The reason why I state that results and post-results are 'almost sorted' is because last week I was asked by my SLT to gain approval from candidates to acquire their scripts following the publication of results. I suspect that this is for teaching and learning purposes, but I had to inform my line manager that JCQ regulations state that candidate consent/permission for copies of scripts to support reviews of marking or to support teaching and learning must be obtained after the publication of results. SLT were unaware of this, and I had to stress the seriousness of ignoring this requirement and the repercussions of failing to follow this clearly defined process.

As for the new academic year, I try to gather information from subject leads around the qualifications being delivered in their departments, the awarding body they are engaging with and the estimated number of students taking particular qualifications as soon as possible. I will be updating this information on a termly basis as I need to know if there are any changes such as which tier candidates will be attempting or decisions by teachers to study a different specification.

Once I have this information I will create my [annual exams plan](#), which details when qualifications will be examined/assessed and an estimate of the number of candidates to be entered/registered. I will compare this 'list' to the information contained within my MIS, focussing upon any 'course file', 'qualification aims' or other reports which can be run from the system to identify any gaps in the information acquired from subject leads.

Gathering accurate information around the qualifications studied by each subject area is critical for any exams officer, so I ensure that I am clear about what information I am requesting and why using the [information gathering form](#) and [annual qualifications plan template](#) produced by *The Exams Office* to create a composite list. I set reasonable internal deadlines that give staff time to respond, whilst stressing that only fully completed forms will be accepted.

If staff are struggling with codes, I do not supply this information for them, but I direct them to their subject specifications or awarding body entry code information as it is their responsibility to provide me with full information about their qualifications to enable me to undertake my role.

I make sure that they are aware of the implications of not providing me with full information in a timely manner is that they may not receive vital information from the awarding body, and therefore, this ensures that the vast majority adhere to my deadline. If departments fail to supply information to the deadline set, I raise this with my line manager via the [EO/Line manager meeting report form](#).

Once I have gathered information from subject leads, I can determine whether any entries will need to be made for the November 2017 exam series, or whether I have to submit entries for any other qualifications offered by an individual awarding body at other time in the autumn term. I will also

know if any qualifications require an upfront registration, or whether any entries will need to be made for the January 2018 or any other exam series in the spring term. I definitely know that there will be entries required for the summer exam series!

By gathering this information at this stage of the academic year, it enables me to confirm awarding body entry procedures for submitting any early information they may require, estimated entries (where required) and final entries. So, from the beginning of the new academic year, I am clear over what needs to be done by when for every qualification undertaken in my centre.

If subject areas are undertaking a different qualification – and this is more likely during a period of qualification reform – I also have time to research to understand how such qualifications (or subject of a qualification) are structured in terms of the method(s) by which they are assessed, for example by written timetabled exams, practical tests, non-examination assessments etc., to identify when the qualifications will be examined/assessed and an estimate of the number of candidates to be entered/registered.

If we have candidates new to our centre, this is also a time to generate/obtain relevant exam candidate identifiers in readiness for making entries/registrations where entry/registration deadlines may fall early in the autumn term; these are candidate number, unique candidate identifier (UCI) and unique learner number (ULN).

It seems like a lot of work to gather information from subject leads but it isn't as onerous as it may seem. As long as you stress the importance of acquiring this information to your deadline you will find that most teaching staff will comply with your request, and if they don't, inform your SLT and ask them to approach the staff guilty of not providing this information to you.

Apart from that, I am not looking too much into the new academic year. I will wait until *The Exams Office* publish their Key Dates Calendar and Exams Timetable Tools before devising my 'Annual Exams Plan' and 'Centre Exams Timetable'. I will also look to update our centre's exam policies next term...but only after I have had a chance to consider the changes to exam regulations as defined by the JCQ.

On that note, I did notice that the JCQ's [Instructions for conducting examinations](#) booklet was published online on Thursday 13 July and although I won't be studying this in any great detail until September, I have had a look at some of the changes. It seems like JCQ have taken on board some of the issues raised by exams officers over the last 12 months...I particularly like the greater onus placed upon my Head of centre and a clearer definition of the role undertaken by SLT who may be present in the examination room. I will also book onto one of the training courses hosted by [Exams Training](#) which looks at exam changes as not only will I acquire a more detailed explanation of the key changes but it is also a unique opportunity to network and discuss the impact upon our role with colleagues from other centres...and at only £145 per delegate this represents excellent value for money and easier to acquire approval for from SLT!

So, whether you are on a term time contract or not, I wish every one of you a peaceful and restful August.