

February 2018

A busy time of year for candidates, staff...and the exams officer

I am writing this on 'Blue Monday', for those of you who don't know it is supposed to be the most depressing day of the year, but to be honest I haven't had time to contemplate it as I wade through my mountain of exam preparation! I know that January and February are generally really busy months with the deadline for summer entries fast approaching and many of us dealing with internal exam seasons. However, just to make things more interesting this year we are delivering a greater number of the Level 2 and 3 external assessments for BTEC Firsts and Nationals during the first three weeks of term followed by the 6th Form internal exams week.

It is a stressful time, especially for a number of our Level 3 BTEC candidates in Year 13 who are re-sitting an external unit which they were unsuccessful in during the summer season. They, and the staff, are feeling the pressure as if they don't pass this time then they cannot continue with the qualification which means nearly two years of hard work worth nothing, but this is the harsh reality of the new BTEC Nationals.

On a happier note we received our GCSE Maths and English re-sit results this month and there were a number of candidates who managed to improve their grades and are now able to move on in their post 16 journey with a wider variety of options open to them.

The unexpected snow days before Christmas were a welcome break that helped us all limp through to the Christmas holidays, although they did put me behind in my entries process for the summer. I used the [information gathering form template](#) and [annual qualifications plan template](#) early in the Autumn term to compile a list of qualifications we are delivering as a centre and entries that need to be made. I hoped to have the basedata imported prior to Christmas but that was delayed until I returned. I have now sent out data collection sheets I printed from my MIS for staff to complete, sign and return to me with a copy of [deadlines for entries , fees and charges template](#) amended to include my own strict internal deadlines (does it make any difference??). I will make the entries in the MIS and print of a second set of data sheets which staff will need to check, sign and return to me before I send the entries to the awarding bodies. Signatures are vitally important as staff need to be accountable for checking their own subject entries.

My life is made more interesting by the fact that we run a Community Languages College for a number of external students, and offer our internal students the opportunity to sit qualifications in their home language. I need to get the main entries completed as soon as possible then it gives me more time to manage these more challenging entries.

This is all of course just for academic qualifications, the vocational qualifications, namely BTEC, come slightly later due to the fact that a number of students have only just sat external assessments and the results will need to be reviewed before summer entries can be confirmed. I do have one candidate who needs modified papers so I have had to make an application to meet the deadline of 31 January based on the assumption that he will be sitting everything again – easier to cancel the order than make it past the deadline and risk not receiving them!

The one saving grace this month is that I get to escape from my centre for the day to attend *The Exams Office's* National Conference at the NEC. I do have BTEC examinations

happening on that day but thanks to a very supportive Line Manager, an amazing Lead Invigilator who doubles as my Exams Administrator, a fantastic team of invigilators and obsessive organisation I am being allowed to go. Although no amount of organisation can help you when you find out that two of the candidates have got Chicken Pox...just need to find an invigilator that doesn't mind being in the room with them!

For those of you who could not attend one of the five conferences, the [presentation slides](#) will be available on *The Exams Office* website in early February.

It was interesting to read the findings of *The Exams Office* survey this year and I am always surprised when I meet other Exams Officers by the differing roles and views centres have of us. I am very lucky in the fact that I was already in the position as a senior teacher in the centre when I was asked to take on this role, and as such am allowed to have responsibility and make decisions at a senior level which makes my life so much easier!

Looking forward to February I am going to get my entries finalised so I can look at my invigilation needs and do a round of recruitment if needs be. Over the last couple of years I have successfully sent a letter out to families and staff to recruit invigilators at this time of year. I have, so far, not had to put out a formal job advertisement but would not rule it out if needs be. When I started this job my centre was relying on a supply agency for invigilators and we had a very small team of our own, but as I need to ensure they are all trained adequately I refuse to consider this as an option any longer. I completed update and access arrangement training with my existing team during the Autumn term when things were a bit quieter and I have also been delivering training at other centres over the last month or so through *The Exams Office's* [invigilation training plan](#). It is always interesting to visit other centres and I always come away learning something new.

I am looking forward to the half-term holiday but have my list of jobs that need to be completed before then. Let's hope there are no more snow days before then...maybe just one would be nice on a Friday or Monday to give us a long weekend!