

## February 2019

This month's blog is written by Lisa Longstaff, Examinations Officer at Dunattor School, Reigate, who considers the importance of briefing candidates ahead of this summer's examination series...

### **Briefing your candidates on this summer's examination series...**

By now most Exam Officers will have completed mock exams for GCSE and GCE subjects, and, without breaking stride, be heading towards submitting entries, NEA administration, invigilator recruitment and invigilator training. There are some useful sources of help with these tasks in the [Key Documents](#) section of *The Exams Office* website.

However, we also need to consider our candidates, without whom none of the above would be necessary. We cannot assume that GCSE candidates will know exactly what is expected of them in the exam room, although hopefully the experience of mocks will have helped guide them. I usually find GCE candidates are aware of what is expected of them, but it is good to remind them all.

Internal/mock examinations are usually less formal, invigilated by teaching staff to some extent, and held within a tighter timeframe and sometimes within classrooms rather than an exams hall/room so whilst they are good preparation, they are not the same.

If you can thoroughly brief candidates before mid-May then they will arrive on exam days knowing where to be and when, with the right equipment, a clear and colourless bottle of water and no mobile phone or data storing device.

So how best to conduct the briefing? You need to ensure that there is support material in place in the form of clear information regarding all aspects of the exam process, this may be a booklet such as the one that [The Exams Office](#) provide for centres to complete. You can use this to prompt you during the briefing and present the information in a structured way. The same information can also be placed on the school website, in pupil and parent portals, to ensure that candidates and parents are aware of the JCQ's, and school specific, regulations.

It is also helpful to have a visual aspect to the briefing, this helps reinforce the booklet and vice versa. The [videos](#) provided by *The Exams Office* are also a useful tool for this, adding further authority and credence to the information, plus featuring students to whom your candidates can relate.

I highlight the JCQ posters and tell students about the announcement at the start of exams and explain that any incidences are logged daily so that we have these to refer back to if required. Familiarity will help ease candidates into those first exams, from which point the rest of the exams series should run smoothly...!

Mobile phones are the bane of all Exams Officers lives during an examination series. Teenagers do not like to be parted from them, they are part of their normal way of life and valuable to them. It is very likely that they may not plan to use them to cheat but want to keep them safe on their person, but the fact remains that they are prohibited. It should not be forgotten that a mobile phone is also a recording device, camera, and provides access to a wealth of information via the internet...as well a device to make phone calls. Statistics from Ofqual confirm that mobile phones are increasingly responsible for malpractice in exams. I quote examples to candidates that I have been given by other

Exams Officers where a student has lost marks as a result of a mobile phone (which had been switched off) dropping out of their pocket and being spotted by the invigilator. Or the occasion when a phone rang as the student was leaving the examination room, as a result of their mother calling to check how the exam went! This also resulted in marks being lost, and the candidate having to re-sit the examination a year later. Each year, I have to reiterate the enormity of the repercussions to candidates of having a mobile phone in your possession whilst taking an examination.

Does your school have a uniform policy/dress code that applies for exams? What about food and drink? Do ensure you explain that clear bottles have to be colourless, not tinted pink/grey/blue as seems to be the current trend?

You can let the students know that there is a seating plan and how to find out where they will be sat in the room. This may change in some centres according to the examination being sat. You should explain to candidates that there will be a method of identifying them. If this is a card on the desk you may wish to have an example to show them.

Be clear about starting times, where to register prior to the examination, and where to store belongings. Are there lockers or another area away from the examination room for storing candidates' possessions? If there is nowhere for mobile phones to be kept safely, you may wish to use a ticketing system outside the examination room and keep mobile phones in boxes until the examination is over.

This year I am holding the GCSE briefing on the same day as I am training my invigilators so that I can introduce them to the candidates. I will remind candidates of their role and that the invigilators will be moving around the examination room.

You will also need to address the procedure in the event of a fire/emergency evacuation – and if there is the opportunity to practise this when you have a standard fire drill then do so. You can arrange with your Fire Officer that when you have the next drill the GCSE and GCE candidates all go to the designated area for their evacuation, away from the rest of the school, and line up in total silence, spaced apart.

Candidates should also be made aware of what to do if they arrive late for an examination, are unwell or have an examination clash. You can pre-empt these to an extent through your candidate exam booklet but be aware that not all candidates will read every word! At our school the administration department hold a confidential, updated mobile phone list for candidates so that we can contact them if they fail to arrive for registration. We encourage candidates to come in if unwell, and if it is necessary, decide on the day to invigilate them separately, with rest breaks as appropriate.

If asked about Special Consideration I always stipulate that there must be evidence of the reason for the application, that the school must pass the information on to the exam board, and that they will decide whether to grant it any special dispensation.

You could also explain the contents of the *JCQ's Information for Candidates for non-examination assessments, coursework, on-screen tests, written exams, social media* and their *Privacy Notice*.

Finally, the candidate briefing is also the ideal opportunity to highlight information relating to Results' Days and Post-results services.

You can feature this in your candidate booklet, informing students of how they will receive their results, what to do if they are unable to collect them (if that is the normal process for your school), and who to contact if they have any concerns they wish to raise. Certificates from Awarding Bodies usually arrive at schools for collection in November.