

The importance of briefing candidates, parents and staff

Candidates being unaware of the JCQ regulations, parents making unrealistic demands, and staff failing to follow rules as defined by the exams officer (and supported by the Head of Centre) are common problems faced by many exams officers during an exam series.

As we approach another summer exams series, many Exams Officers will try to ensure that candidates, parents and staff are aware of the 'dos and don'ts' regarding exam regulations. It isn't an easy task – particularly when some think that they are already fully aware of the regulations, and others who consider the rules to be optional!

So, how do you increase awareness of exam regulations amongst candidates, parents and staff at this time of year?

Candidates

It is strongly recommended that in the weeks leading up to the summer exam series a 'briefing' or 'exam assembly' is held. There are many areas that you should cover in this briefing, including key information such as:

- Exam start times
- Late arrival policy
- What to do if there is an exam clash
- How seating information will be provided
- Relevant rules and regulations

You may also want to consider focusing on some of the following areas, depending on issues which may be relevant to your centre (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Candidate numbers
- Exam timetable and exam room information
- Identification requirements
- Instructions for personal belongings
- Mobile phone policy
- Exam equipment requirements
- Role of the invigilator
- Malpractice warnings
- Absence from exams

- Illness
- Information for candidates with access arrangements

Following the briefing, you may decide to reinforce expectations by disseminating a [Candidate Exam Handbook](#) – this could also be addressed to parents with a form to be returned confirming that both the candidate and parent(s) have read the handbook and agree to comply with its' contents.

Although an exam briefing prior to the exams series is very worthwhile, there is the issue of absent students. How do you deal with those who were not present – particularly when they may be more likely to cause issues during exam time?

Parents

With little/no face-to-face contact with parents between now and the start of the exam series, relaying information is problematic. You will need to make parents aware of information relating to (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Exam start time
- Late arrival
- Absence
- Illness
- Behaviour
- Dress code
- Food and drink
- Malpractice – including unauthorised materials

However, you could utilise the following:

- Candidate Exam Handbook – if you provide a hard copy version for candidates at the exam briefing (see above), include a 'cut off' slip which needs to be signed by both the candidate and parent to confirm understanding and compliance.
- School newsletter – if there is a school newsletter to be issued whilst candidates are still attending daily, include information for parents in relation to exams.
- School website – add exam information relevant to parents on your school website.

Teaching staff

Teaching staff have two areas to consider/support – being aware of their role (and what they can and cannot do) and reinforcing expectations and regulations to students.

Ideally, teaching staff should be utilising some lesson time to cover a range of areas relating to exams – from equipment requirements to behaviour, to correctly completing the front of the answer booklet to the role of the invigilators (and what they can and cannot do). It may be that the Exams Officer has to produce a list of areas to cover and what is/is not permissible to ensure that teaching staff are providing the correct and most up-to-date information.

Exams Officers may also need to update teaching staff on changes to regulations in relation to their involvement of exam days. For example, there may need to be an update on the JCQ's regulations relating to [The people present in the examination room](#), or on teaching staff being used for invigilation.

In some centres, there may be a need to clarify who can and cannot enter the examination room to perform specific tasks as detailed in JCQ's Instructions for conducting examinations booklet (Appendix 8, page 58)

The Exams Office – hints and tips

The Exams Office has five hints and tips for Exams Officers to help increase awareness of regulations and expectations amongst candidates, parents and staff:

1. Hold candidate briefings at the start of the qualification (Year 10), before each mock exam session, and prior to the summer exam series – not only will this increase familiarity of expectations, but it will also ensure that absence from one session is not used as an excuse of being unaware of the regulations.
2. Employ JCQ rules and regulations for mock examinations.
3. Request that teaching staff highlight exam rules and regulations during lessons, including the administrative tasks which will need to be undertaken – such as completing the front of the answer booklet correctly, numbering answers, and clearly crossing out work which the examiner should ignore.
4. Utilise parents' evenings and school newsletters to inform parents of exam rules and regulations. At parents evening, a member of SLT or the Head of Centre may include 'exam regulations and expectations' in a speech to all parents, or if no speeches are planned you may need to disseminate hard copy information.
You should also issue reminders via school newsletters and add an 'exams' section to your website which, amongst other information, includes the role of parents in relation to their son/daughter's exams.
5. Ask SLT if an INSET day could include exam regulations relevant to teaching staff. You could produce a list of 'dos and don'ts' and conclude

with a 'Yes/No, True/False quiz' which may include a prize. The outcome of this 'quiz' may also reinforce gaps in knowledge and the need to be aware of the changes in regulations.