

## June 2019

This month's blog is written by Marcia Woods - an invigilator trainer, and ex-Exams Officer at Brookfields Community School, Chesterfield - who considers the tasks undertaken by Exams Officers at this time of year and how to manage the special consideration process...

### **Managing the special consideration process...and other tasks to undertake at this time of year**

Hopefully by the time you are reading this blog you will be well into the routine of daily exams, your secure storage will be visibly emptying and, more importantly, most of you will have had at least one day off over May half term to allow you to catch your breath and recharge your batteries.

It was interesting to read in the April and May blogs both Gemma and Jane mention that their roles in school have changed and they have been training new exams officers to undertake the role they are vacating. As my husband has now reached an age when he can receive some pension income, I decided the time was right for me to 'retire' from working as a full-time exams officer at February half term. Although I was looking forward to not having to work extended hours from Easter to the end of June, I could not bear the thought of abandoning the world of exams completely, so, I was really pleased to be able to continue to visit a number of schools, particularly in March and April, to run in-house invigilator training events. I have met lots of brilliant exams officers, their invigilator teams and often teaching assistants too. I have also had the privilege of seeing their working areas: from the school for students with special needs with a 'box within a box' not much larger than a hotel room safe, to the new build school with a purpose built storage room with secure cabinets, shelving units and a table to split papers on. I was not jealous in the slightest!! I think I was most intrigued by the school in Coventry with a Jaguar car in the foyer; even better the students were using the car as a substitute for a picnic table!

I hope you will also be suitably impressed that I have also passed the interview to become an invigilator at my old school (I recognised the questions as I had written them in previous years). So I now have the opportunity to see exams from a different perspective, and yes, I can confirm that the time does seem to pass quite slowly in the exam room!

Hopefully, you will only have a few more weeks of external exams to go and the contingency day(s) will not have been called into use this year, however, I know that some of you will then be continuing on with internal exams, so hang on in there, as the end is in sight. We all know that a colleague not involved in examinations will utter the words "Well, you can put your feet up now for the rest of the term". If this is the case, please count to ten and then simply smile, as if only they knew!

### **Special consideration**

One of the first tasks that you will need to focus on as soon as your external exams are completed, is making applications for special consideration, if required, and it is very likely that most of you will have at least one application even if it is only for a candidate suffering the effects of hay fever or a heavy cold whilst sitting an exam.

JCQ have produced a guide to the special consideration process for general and vocational qualifications and the current document is available on their website <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance/a-guide-to-the-special-consideration-process-2018-2019>

The regulations state that candidates are eligible for special consideration if they have been fully prepared and have covered the whole course, but their performance in an exam or non-examined assessment is materially affected by adverse circumstances beyond their control. These circumstances might include:

- temporary illness or injury;
- bereavement at or near the time of the assessment (there are various time limits);
- the anniversary of a bereavement or ongoing implications, such as an inquest or court case; domestic crisis (not including a house-move);
- a **serious** disturbance during the exam; accidental events such as being given an incorrect exam paper or the failure of vital equipment;
- participation in sporting events etc at **international** level;
- failure by the centre to implement a previously approved access arrangement.

Finally, if a candidate sits more than 6 hours (A level) or 5.5 hours (GCSE) of exams in one day special consideration can be requested for the final exam on the day to take account of fatigue.

Special consideration is a post-exam adjustment to a candidate's mark to reflect adverse circumstances out of their control, but which are reasonably likely to have had a material effect on the candidate's ability to take an assessment or demonstrate their normal level of attainment. It is important to inform those involved that the maximum allowance is 5% of total marks and would be reserved for exceptional circumstance such as the very recent death of a member immediate family.

Applications for special consideration for AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC are all made online via their secure websites. To complete the online form you will need to provide details of the candidate (name and exam number), dates and details of the exam affected, and a brief description of the reason why the candidate was disadvantaged or absent for an exam. You will also need to state the name and position of the person providing evidence to support the request. This might be you as Exams Officer, a medical professional, member of school staff such as Head of Year, or a parent. You will also need to have written evidence to support the request which will need to be kept in school to be made available if requested by an awarding body.

Although I would wait until a candidate has completed all of their exams for the season before making one application for all affected exams for each awarding body, as required, as soon as I became aware of a candidate requiring special consideration I would print a copy of their individual timetable from my MIS system. However, at this stage, I would highlight the exams that had been affected by the disadvantage or absence and make a note of the difficulties faced and keep this document in a folder along with supporting evidence in preparation to submit this at the end of the exams series. Supporting evidence could be the exam room incident log completed by your invigilators (yes, there is a purpose to them), a signed note from a member of school staff who is aware of a candidate's domestic circumstances, a letter from a medical professional or hospital discharge note, a photocopy of the label on a packet of prescription medication, a note from a parent informing of a bereavement, or a

completed self-certification form (JCQ Form 14 <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/forms/form-14-self-certification-form>)

If a candidate has been **absent** from an examination for a valid reason, special consideration can be applied for as long as they have completed at least 25% of the assessment requirements for a complete linear GCSE or A level qualification. If the request is approved, the awarding body will calculate an overall mark and grade based on the assessments completed, using a designated method of calculation.

Hopefully the special consideration applications you make for your candidates will help your disadvantaged students achieve the grades they truly deserve.

I know that even once you have completed applications for special consideration, you will still have plenty of work to complete before the end of term. This may include:

- tidying your secure storage and putting away your exam boxes ready for the next season;
- reviewing your summer season;
- making a note of things to change for the future and perhaps making adjustments to your policies as necessary;
- perhaps starting to collect estimated entries for next year (yes we are thinking about 2020 already) from your Heads of Subject;
- starting to prepare for results day(s).

However, I hope that you will be able to start working your normal hours again, or even begin to claim back the extra hours you may have clocked up during the last couple of months. I also hope that you will be able to escape from school to attend [The Exams Office's summer conference](#) either in London or Leeds to meet with fellow exams officers and get the latest information regarding exams. If you are going to the Leeds conference, I look forward to meeting you on 8 July.

Finally, if someone says "Well you can put your feet up for the rest of term", remember to smile very sweetly, and remember that there is a community of people who know exactly what you do all year round and the pivotal role you play in helping students achieve their academic potential and supporting them as they embark upon higher/further education or employment. Actions are more important than words, so please ignore any ill-informed comments, and keep the faith!