

Maintaining motivation amongst your invigilators

This month's blog is written by Alexis Wragg, exams officer at Rugby School, who considers the methods which can be employed to maintain motivation amongst invigilators.

Exams Officers often run one of the largest departments within school, and while this in itself is a challenge, managing a department which contains staff such as invigilators, with whom you do not interact with on a daily basis, makes the situation even harder. So, how do you motivate your invigilators to ensure that you get the best out of them, when you don't see them every day?

Make your team feel valued

Asking your team to reflect on the positives and negatives of the year can be a source of innovative ideas for the department and it will often give you reassurance that you are doing your job well.

A 'wash-up' meeting at the end of the year is an effective way to get feedback and listen to your invigilators. Two years ago, I divided my team into groups, and armed with flip chart paper and felt tip pens they completed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of the summer season. It worked brilliantly; they appreciated being part of the process and I got some fantastic feedback. I made a point of returning to their comments during the year to show how their ideas were being implemented and some of them are now embedded into our exam processes. This activity empowered them and allowed them to effectively contribute to the success of the exams office.

A simple survey or even a suggestion box could equally provide you with feedback and give your invigilators a chance to share their ideas.

Sending a thank you card at the end of a tough season shows appreciation and a personalised message demonstrates you care enough about them to take the time to do it.

Clear Communication

In the current climate, writing to your invigilators about exams and the latest government decisions enables you to stay in touch, and it keeps them updated with your centre's plans.

Starting the academic year with a meeting allows you to catch up with your team, making it informal with refreshments keeps the mood light. This meeting allows you to update your invigilators on any new JCQ rules and regulations you want to implement in the mock exam seasons ahead. It also allows you to feedback on the success the students had over the summer. I found this completes the cycle as invigilators like to know the achievements of the students they have supported and what those students have gone on to do.

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Asking the invigilators for their availability well in advance of your exams seasons allows you to plan effectively. When allocating their invigilation slots, give them their timetable in plenty of time, for me that is a week before our April training meeting. Ask them to bring it with them and at the end of the meeting to go over slots you haven't managed to fill. It's a great way to finish off your planning.

Not everyone responds to the same type of communication in the same way, for some an e mail works perfectly, for others a quick phone call might be necessary. While we don't want to repeat work, it is important to know the ways you can get the best response from each individual.

Create a positive working environment

We all want our invigilators to want to come to work so giving them a welcome feeling is vital.

Think about your team and what they might like to make their days a little better, or even better ask them for their ideas. During mock weeks we have back to back exams and those invigilators who are in all day have a tray of healthy snacks to help themselves to. But of course, a pack of chocolate biscuits is always on hand too.

Privately praising individuals when they do a good job, or have stepped in to help is vital to make anyone feel valued. It is equally important to praise collectively and publically to show that you appreciate their hard work.

Responsibility and Progression

When I was new to the exams officer role, during an exam series I would spend most of my time running between the exam rooms. Now I have learnt to trust my chiefs and will call in to an exam to check everything is fine when I get the opportunity. I provide specific training to my chiefs which clearly sets out how I want the exams to run, and they are able to deliver that to the standard I expect. Placing the responsibility on them has freed up my time to deal with any other issues more effectively as I am not anxious about the main exam rooms.

Ensuring your invigilators are up to speed with access arrangements within the centre is part of the JCQ publication [Instructions for conducting examinations](#) (ICE), section 13.6, which states that 'The head of centre must ensure that the person appointed is a responsible adult, is appropriately trained and fully understands the rules of the access arrangements' but briefing them on any issues which may impact on the student's attitude or behaviour prior to the exam not only improves communication, but can also allow your invigilators to take more responsibility should a situation arise. Slowly they start to learn how you would react in those situations, and through time develop their skills when working with a wide range of student needs.

Training your invigilators is a JCQ requirement referenced in the [ICE publication](#), section 12.1, and The Exams Office provide excellent online training especially with their new [Invigilator Digital Accreditation](#) but a variety of training on offer may well surprise you. As a result of feedback we offered first aid training to anyone who was interested, and we had over a 50%

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uptake. It now means I can have an invigilator with basic first aid training in every main exam room.

Providing Support

Managing your team's individual needs can be difficult. One way to support them is to respond positively to the things your invigilators cannot change or control. This way they are much more likely to repay you with the kindness you have shown them in the future.

Learning to delegate how you provide that support is also important. In my case, my team have learnt that my assistant is a whizz at solving any IT issues or forgotten passwords and they now go to her and not me for support. It means they get the help they need quicker and feel better supported.

We have all learnt new IT skills over this year using Teams or Zoom to communicate with our colleagues. So now is the time to look forward and consider how we might use those skills in the future. Recording one of my assemblies with a talk over a PowerPoint and watching the video updates from the TEO led me to thinking, I could record short videos for my invigilators on different aspects of the role in our centre and these could then be uploaded to our 'Invigilator Team' for them to access whenever they want, e.g. how to evacuate from our main exam rooms.

Returning to work after a long break is never easy and your invigilation team may be apprehensive, but by listening to their concerns, responding positively to their needs and providing an environment in which they feel safe and supported will help to make the process as smooth as possible.