FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CONFIRMING ROOMING AND SEATING PLANS AHEAD OF THE SUMMER EXAM SERIES

In the build-up the summer exams series, two tasks which every exams officer will be undertaking in the coming weeks will be to confirm the rooming arrangements for each examination session, and the seating plan in each room used for an examination.

In this article, we consider the key factors which should be considered when rooming candidates and devising a seating plan.

Rooming

The period prior to the exam series is known as the pre-exams (or exam preparation) period. It consists of a series of tasks which are pivotal in ensuring that every exam day is successfully delivered in line with JCQ regulations. One such task is to ensure that an adequate number of appropriate rooms are available to accommodate all candidates during each exam session.

It is the responsibility of an exams officer to ensure that any room in which an exam is held provides candidates with appropriate conditions for taking the exam – these are detailed in section 11 of JCQ's *Instructions for conducting examinations* publication. It should be noted that internal school/college tests and mock exams cannot take place in the same room when an external exam is being conducted.

One of the first tasks an exams officer will undertake is to calculate the number of rooms required, before completing a room 'audit' to identify the rooms which would be suitable for conducting examinations.

Candidates with access arrangements, or other requirements, will need to be considered when allocating rooms, for example, it may be that separate rooms are required for candidates requiring the use of a scribe, or additional rooms will be required to accommodate candidates and their reader.

In addition to the room(s) for the conducting of the examination, exams officers will also need to consider where candidates will store their personal belongings (e.g. bags, mobile phones, etc).

The significance of ensuring that a sufficient number of rooms are available on each exam day/session, means that rooms must be booked for exam use well in advance – this may require liaison and negotiation with relevant members of centre staff who are being asked to relinquish their teaching room for the length of the exam series.

Key principles

When deciding on which rooms are required, an exams officer will very likely have a key principle(s) which underpins their requirement when selecting a specific room(s). For example,

if experiencing a lack of/shortage of invigilators, an exams officer will utilise rooms which maximise the invigilator/candidate ratio. This may include a large room which can accommodate 180 candidates (a multiple of 30) and/or smaller rooms which can comfortably seat 30, 60 or 90 candidates.

If there is a shortage of available rooms within a centre, an exams officer should ensure that the largest room(s) is secured for the conducting of examinations as this will ensure, at the very least, that all candidates can be accommodated on each exam day.

If an exams officer is keen to avoid multiple exams in the same room, and the disruption this would cause with different finishing times, rooms will be required to accommodate individual examinations, or examinations of the same duration.

If an exams officer is in a centre where a significant number of candidates are using word processors as their normal way of working, and thus also require a word processor during the exam, then rooms which meet the requirements as set out in sections 14.20-14.27 of JCQ's *Instructions for conducting examinations* publication will be required.

Seating plans

Once the required number of rooms have been allocated, an exams officer's attention will turn to creating a seating plan that shows the exact position of each candidate in the exam room. This is a requirement regardless of the number of candidates in the exam room, and invigilators must be informed that any changes made to seating arrangements during the exam must be noted on the seating plan.

Exams officers with access to a Management Information System (MIS) should be able to use this system to create seating plans. Those without access to a MIS will need to create their own seating plans, or use/customise the template provided by The Exams Office.

Candidates should normally be seated in candidate number order, and those with access arrangements must be identified on the seating plans that are held as part of the centre records.

It is good practice for exams officers to inform candidates of seating arrangements for each examination and brief invigilators about the seating plan before the start of each exam

The seating plan must be available to an awarding body upon request, with centres required to keep signed records of the seating plan until the deadline for reviews of marking has passed or until any appeal, malpractice or other results enquiry has been completed, whichever is later.

Key principles

How an exams officer creates a seating plan will depend on the circumstances in their centre, however, the following principles should be considered when creating a seating plan:

- JCQ requirements (see *Instructions for conducting examinations*)

- Room layout and capacity (for example, try and leave an empty desk/chair between candidates taking different exams or finishing at different times, candidates feeling anxious, or those who arrived late for the examination, etc.)

- Whether exams in more than one subject will be taking place in the same room (for example, seat candidates taking the examination finishing first nearest to the exit)

- Candidates with access arrangements and other requirements (for example, if a candidate is approved extra time ensure that they can be easily identified at the end of the exam (separated by an empty desk/chair perhaps) or a candidate using a word processor is seated near a power socket and away from other candidates so they are not disturbed/or cannot see the candidate's answers on screen)

- Candidates with timetable clashes (ensure that any candidates with a timetable clash/variation are easily identified – for example with an empty desk/chair behind and in front of them – so they are not mistakenly dismissed along with the other candidates at the end of the examination)

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