

## It's half time in the summer 2017 exams series...

**It's 'half time' in the exams series...and I am hoping for no surprises in the second half, and that I'm not 'sick as a parrot' come the end of the exams series!**

I'm writing this on the Saturday of half term – FA Cup final day – so excuse the reference to football above! However, it is quite apt as in our 'exams world' it seems that we are about half way through the exams series.

The two weeks around the half term break are the busiest for me, and 'touch wood' everything seems to be going according to plan – well most of the time!

In this job we have to plan for the unexpected – that's why JCQ insist on an '[Exams Contingency Plan](#)' – and in every series I come across at least one unexpected occurrence. This year, and I hope I'm not tempting fate for more after half term(!), the only issue has been the heat with candidates complaining of feeling unwell...with one having to leave the exam room for a short period. I'm not surprised that some candidates were distressed – I can only imagine how the mix of nerves, the very warm environment/atmosphere and the importance of the occasion would cause problems. The candidates always have my utmost respect for what they are going through...rather than me.

I may as well have the keys to the school during an exams series as I am the first in and last out on most days, but that's not a complaint, it's what I have to do at this time of year. In any case, I like to have plenty of time in the mornings to prepare for the day's exams. I have a routine which includes switching on my computer (which gives me a chance to make my coffee!) and to check for emails which may contain any last minute erratum notices from awarding bodies for the day's exams. Then, in my secure room, I identify the question papers (and any erratum notices) for each exam, adding any other required resources and the answer booklets (and loose additional answer sheets/supplementary answer booklets if appropriate). I include the attendance register, seating plan and desk ID cards to identify students, and we are ready to go...!

By then, my invigilation team have begun to arrive and I ask one of them to check the date, session, subject, (paper, tier, option etc.) prior to the opening of each exam paper packet. I also arrange papers for our access arrangements candidates along with their cover sheets, if applicable.

Finally, I conduct my daily briefing for my invigilation team, confirming the exam(s) taking place in their room, the arrangement of the seating plan and any erratum notices. I highlight any clash candidates and their supervision arrangements, and likewise for access arrangements candidates. I confirm the requirement to complete the '[Exam Room Checklist](#)' and '[Exam Room Incident Log](#)' before asking all invigilators to check and update the contents of their '[Exam Room Box](#)'...and then it's over to them!

Whilst the examinations are being conducted, I am on standby for any emergencies – including the inspector's visit...and yes, he has already been!! The centre inspection went well, as I expected it would. He was very thorough in his checking of my exam policies, paying particular attention to our '[Disability Policy](#)' and '[Emergency Evacuation Procedure](#)'. He was impressed with our policy folder – although I admit that this was largely due to the templates I downloaded and completed from The Exams Office website – and that I had covered the emergency evacuation procedure with my invigilators during our training session in March.

He also discussed how I manage the requirement for a 'roving invigilator' where there is one-to-one invigilation. I explained that I carried out this role, using it as a method of ensuring that I was aware of what was happening in each room as well as confirming that access arrangements were applied correctly. I showed him the '[roving invigilator checklist](#)' which I use, and he was very impressed with the thoroughness of the process I have in place. The inspection went well, 'all ticks'!...but I must admit that I am always glad when the inspector left! It doesn't matter how many years you have been in the role and how thoroughly you have planned, there is always a huge sense of relief when the inspection has been passed and the inspector is driving out of the school gates!

Despite my best efforts, there is always room for improvement, and this exams series is no different. I keep a note of areas in need of improvement, and so far, I have three on my 'list':

- Make it clear to teachers that they will only receive question papers on the day following an examination. One teacher knew that the JCQ 'ICE' booklet had changed to allow teachers to receive the question papers after the awarding body's published finishing time or, if there is a timetable variation in our school, after candidates in our centre have completed the examination. That's fine, but I'd prefer to hand these over the next day, so I will be adding this to our [Exams Policy](#) and making the situation clear to all teaching staff.
- In the training of my invigilators I must emphasise not only the JCQ requirements, but also what I expect of all of my invigilators. Of course the JCQ regulations must be adhered to, but there are some ways of working with I require my invigilators to adopt, such as what needs to be included on the Exam Room Incident Log. Currently, I have some invigilators recording everything including candidates putting their hands up to ask questions, whilst others only add 'incidents' such as toilet requests/visits. I need to ensure greater consistency so I acquire a more comprehensive and accurate picture of what is happening in each exam room.
- Utilising the support of Head of Sixth Form to ensure that post-16 students do not forget their lanyards. We use these as the identifier for Year 12 and 13 students, and some have been forgetting to bring them for their exams. Year 11 students have cards on their desks, but the lanyards contain the student's name, photo and candidate number, and when they forget to bring these – which has been far too often during this exams series – I have to rush to produce a desk ID card...and I don't need this added task on the morning of an exam.

So, there you go, even us experienced exams officers are always looking for ways to improve our ways of working. This brings me onto my professional development and looking ahead to the 2017/18 academic year. I have booked onto the [Exams Training Experienced Exams Officer Training](#) course being held in September. This will focus upon JCQ and Ofqual changes and planning for the new academic year and is the perfect way to start and plan for the new academic year. I attended this course last year and it was excellent value for money at just £145...I urge to book your place before capacity is reached!

Anyway, that's all for now...I'm taking a break from all things exams over half term, with my 'batteries' recharged to successfully complete the 2017 exams series.

Good luck everyone!