April 2018

A guide to briefing candidates

You know that the summer exam series is looming large when you begin planning for your candidate briefing…

Hopefully we have put the snow days behind us all now, and the mayhem they can cause an Exam Officer!

Entries are all in, some amendments to be made perhaps, invigilation timetables are being drawn up, invigilators trained, but what about the candidates?

Candidate briefings are a vital part of the role and can be conducted prior to mocks as well as the main exam season in May and June.

Well-briefed candidates should leave centres less open to malpractice issues, particularly of the mobile phone kind, which Ofqual inform us are seeing a massive growth in student penalties issued.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672008/Report_-_Malpractice_for_GCSE_and_A-level_summer_2017.pdf

I prefer to brief my GCSE and A level candidates separately, and I do this in their PSHE session. This can ideally be carried out in March/April so that the information remains fresh. My centre now holds some GCSE mock exams at the end of the Autumn term, so I plan to run an additional briefing in November too from 2018/19 academic year, to ensure that the mocks run in the same format, particularly beneficial to the new year 11s.

At the briefing I begin with a brief PowerPoint presentation with photos of past exam candidates smiling with their certificates (we have their permission to use these), information such as timings and where to go, plus an example of the front page of an exam paper to discuss completing the details required. I also cover stationery and what to do if they need help/more paper.

I include in the PowerPoint the invigilator's role to observe and be vigilant as well as helpful. I tell them the invigilator will move around the room to fulfil their role. This leads onto malpractice and the types of items not allowed into the room, mainly focusing on mobile phones of course.

At the end I hand them a booklet each with the following information, this is also added to the student portal. (You can download a Candidate Exam Handbook template from *The Exams Office* website):

- **Exam start and finish dates** – in my centre 14th May to 26th June
- **Exam session timings** – usually 9.00am and 1.30pm
- **Registration** – we register candidates away from the exam rooms at 8.30am and 1.00pm respectively so that we can see if anyone is absent and needs tracking down prior to entering the room. You need to ensure a member of staff is

available to get on the phone if need be and you should ensure that you have current contact numbers. I ask for these at the candidate briefing.

- **Exam rooms** – you may have a main area, but also smaller rooms for access.
- **What stationery do they need?** – we give them a list which is also available on the student portal. Also ensure they know they can only use highlighters on the questions, no correcting pens/tippex
- **Prohibited items in the room** – mobile phones, smart watches, any technological/web enabled sources of information, notes, books
- **Watches** – your centre may say they simply cannot be brought into the room, but JCQ still allow them on the desk top if they are not smart watches.
- **Dress code** – you may wish year 11s to wear centre uniform and sixth formers to dress as usual for centre.
- **Toilet breaks** - Remember to visit the toilet before the exam and that all toilet breaks are accompanied and logged.
- **Late arrival** - What candidates should do if they are delayed getting to centre – be aware of your late arrival policy
- **What to do if they are unwell** – your SENCo can liaise with you to confirm if rest breaks or other requirements relating to illness are permitted. You can mention medication that needs to be brought into exam rooms and your centre's policy on this.
- **Exam administration** - Where to find their candidate number in the exam room, and the details to enter onto the question/answer paper – this is vital now that exams staff are not allowed to complete missing information
- **Identifying candidates** - All candidates must be identifiable according to JCQ regulations, so you can tell the candidate that their details will be on their desk, this may be a photo card or you may have photos in a separate folder on the invigilator's desk. The JCQ inspector will ask how you identify candidates. Perhaps your SLT are present outside the room to aid identification?
- **What to do if they finish early** – what is your centre policy?
- **Seeking assistance** - How to get help/more paper during the exam – not to ask friends, put hand up and invigilator will come to you.
- **Results day(s)** – What is the procedure? Do students collect in person/do you email? Dates and timing for collection. Your centre should have teaching staff available to discuss results.
- **Post-results** – how to request these. Who to talk to if you are unsure. You can include in the results section your centre's information about NEAs and any other centre marked assessments, including details on requesting reviews of the marking prior to submission. This could also refer to the centre's policy on the centre website perhaps.

I include all this information in the booklet which is given to students and placed on the student portal, where they have the various JCQ candidate information on social media, privacy, NEAs/assessments and the JCQ Information for candidates for written exams.

Well informed candidates will hopefully make the whole exam experience easier for themselves, and for their centre exam staff, give you more confidence about the JCQ inspection, plus reduce potential malpractice.