



Summer Conference 2025

Handling difficult conversations
with senior leaders, centre staff
and candidates/parents

Objective

A workshop which provides advice and guidance in managing difficult exams-related conversations with senior members of staff, peers and external stakeholders





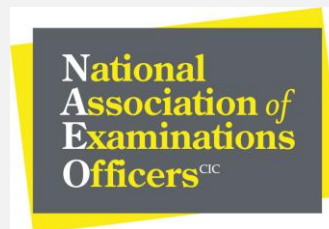
Scenario 1: Senior staff



- Candidate's phone has gone off (or been identified) during the exam on their person, but SLT/HoC do not want to report this incident as suspected malpractice to the relevant awarding body



Scenario 1: Responding to senior staff



- Be direct and professional, base any discussions on the regulations
- Politely explain your concerns and, if possible, offer alternatives
- Emphasise your role and/or responsibilities as an exams officer to uphold the 'Values and Attributes' of the examination system. This is also required to achieve the *Exams Officer Professional Standards*
- Explain the importance of the *Head of Centre declaration*
- Suggest alternative solutions (if possible)
- Escalate the issue internally (to the Human Resources department quoting any relevant centre policy, for example, the exam-related *Whistleblowing Policy*) and/or externally to the JCQ or the relevant awarding body if an alternative solution cannot be found
- Document/retain all conversation details/correspondence



Scenario 2: Teaching staff (peer)

- Teaching staff failing to submit exam entry information to an internally set deadline



Scenario 2: Responding to teaching staff

- Understand their perspective, for example:
 - What is stopping them from completing the relevant tasks(s)/Why are they not adhering to the regulations/requirements?
 - Do they have any concerns and objections? To find out, listen actively, ask open-ended questions, and empathise with their feelings, build rapport and trust by showing genuine interest and respect for their point of view
- Address their concerns, for example:
 - Do not ignore or dismiss their concerns
 - Provide clear and relevant information, evidence, or examples that can counter their doubts and support your proposal
 - Use facts, logic, and data, but also appeal to their emotions and values
 - If applicable, show them a solution(s) which can benefit them and solve their problems
 - Use positive and confident language, avoid being pushy or aggressive



Scenario 2: Responding to teaching staff

■ Involve staff in the process

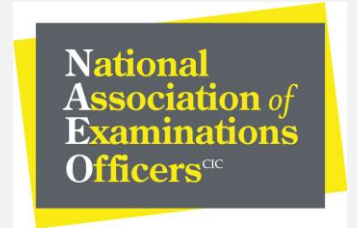
- Do not just tell them what to do, but ask for their opinions, feedback, and suggestions
- Make them feel part of the solution, not the problem
- Give them options, choices, and alternatives, but also guide them towards your preferred outcome
- Use questions that imply agreement, such as "How do you feel about this option?" or "What would it take for you to say yes?"
- Use the actions of others who have adhered to the regulations/requirements

■ Use positive reinforcement

- Praise them for their willingness to listen, consider, and act on your proposal
- Express your appreciation and gratitude for their cooperation and support
- Remind them of the benefits and value of following the regulations/requirements
- Follow up with them and provide them with any assistance or guidance they may need. By doing this, you can strengthen your relationship with them and increase the likelihood of future persuasion



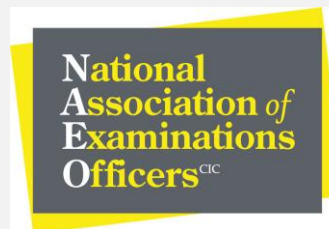
Scenario 3: Support staff (peer)



- Reception staff failing to fully/regularly complete the receipt of confidential materials log (at the point of delivery)



Scenario 3: Responding to support staff



- Create a friendly relationship
- Recognise that you are asking your colleague(s) to hand over one of their most valuable commodities...time
- Show respect by speaking to them in person...not just email
- Be grateful. Every communication should show thanks, using positive and appreciative language on a regular basis

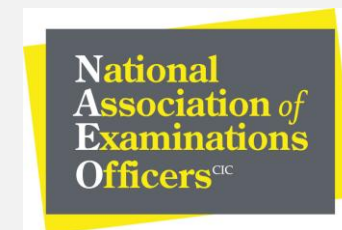


Scenario 4: Parents/candidates

- A parent has requested a meeting at which they demand separate invigilation/rooming for their child who is suffering from exam nervousness
- *Note: Issues involving parents and/or candidates should be escalated to, or involve, your senior leader/SENCo etc. An exams officer should not be dealing with these situations alone*



Scenario 4: Responding to parents and/or candidates



- Allow parents to clarify the issue and request being made
- Acknowledge their perspective/viewpoint before introducing a differing opinion, using phrases such as, "I understand where you're coming from, but based on the regulations, we are required to.."
- Provide factual evidence: Instead of simply saying "you are wrong," offer concrete evidence from the regulations/centre policy to support your point
- Always quote from JCQ regulations/awarding body requirements and centre policies
- Even though their request may be unrealistic/in conflict with the regulations, remain calm and respectful. Avoid direct confrontation and focus on the facts of the situation