

## **To All GCSE & GCE Candidates and Parents**

### **ABSENCE AND ILLNESS AND PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS**

Every year there is confusion over this issue so I am writing this letter to clarify the situation and explain the Examination Boards' position.

#### **Will illness, bereavement etc. affect my grades?**

What needs to be understood is the fundamental principle of the way Public Examinations are marked. Great care is taken to ensure that every single paper is marked to the same standard. Candidates are marked for their *achievement* not for their *potential*. This means it is what candidates write on the day of the examination that is all important, not what they might have written. If a candidate is unfit, it is very likely to affect his or her performance.

#### **Does this mean nothing can be done?**

Not at all. In cases of genuine problems (illness, bereavement, taken ill in examination etc.) a Special Consideration Form can be submitted to the Examination Boards. For this to happen the candidate must present evidence (a doctor's note for illness, an explanatory letter for non-medical emergencies) within 24 hours of the examination. The form is then sent off, the candidate's paper is marked in the usual way, but the marks are then viewed sympathetically at the grade awarding stage. It must be emphasised that Special Consideration can only be given for valid reasons. Holidays, sporting fixtures, part-time jobs, mis-reading the timetable, oversleeping etc. are not valid reasons. **On any one paper the most compensation an Exam Board will offer is 5% in extreme cases, more usual is 1 or 2% of raw marks.**

#### **If I miss an examination does this mean I can't get a grade?**

If a candidate has completed at least 50% of an examination and is then absent with good reason a special consideration form is sent off as explained above and an exceptional circumstances award may be given. If the missed unit is required for a further certification it must be taken at a later session. In subjects where there is only one written paper (eg GCSE English Literature) a grade cannot be awarded if the exam is missed.

A candidate should not sit an examination if they are deemed medically unfit to do so.

In all cases, if a grade is awarded, it may not necessarily be as high as the candidate was hoping for had he or she completed all components.

#### **What about long-term illness? (eg Glandular Fever)**

If a candidate has missed long periods of study, or not been able to study properly, he or she may well not yet have achieved the standard required for the examination in that year. Unfortunately there is no compensation given for lack of preparation. Once again it is achievement, not potential that is being examined. Special Consideration is for *hardships at the time of the examination only*.

#### **Illness and Coursework**

As long study 'windows' are given for coursework to be completed, special consideration can only be given in exceptional circumstances. A candidate who has left work to the last minute and then falls ill cannot be given Special Consideration. *Don't get caught out* - prepare your work in good time for the deadlines.

#### **Absence from Examinations**

If a candidate misses an examination for no valid reason, there are two courses of action. **Either** (1) The candidate will receive a mark of 0 for the paper missed and be awarded a grade based on the marks achieved in the other papers/coursework. The GCSE certificate will be endorsed to show that this has happened. This grade will of course in all probability be a low one. **Or** (2) The candidate may be withdrawn from the examination by the school on payment of a £30 withdrawal fee for GCSE, up to £80 for GCE. (This is what it costs the school for each subject each candidate takes.)

#### **What about candidates with specific learning difficulties?**

Learning Support deals with these. Such candidates have been diagnosed by **designated** Educational Psychologists or a specialist teacher and may be given extra time or other specific special arrangements in the examinations. They are not given Special Consideration as well (unless an emergency arises of course). The Boards' decision is final.

I hope this letter has clarified some of the issues. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

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