

Major Incident Protocol – MRCS Part B OSCE

Introduction

For the purposes of this document, the major incidents covered relate only to events that occur during the exam, or on the day of the exam.

This document aims to provide a standardised approach across all four Colleges in dealing with major incident, and is divided for ease of use into the following sections:

1. An incident occurs that causes a delayed start to the exam
2. An incident occurs after the exam has started that causes a stoppage and subsequent delay
3. An examiner is unable to complete a station for whatever reason
4. An incident occurs after the exam has finished
5. Suggestions to help Colleges and Supervising examiners prevent major incidents from occurring, or mitigate their impact

The guidance for sections 1 and 2 is then designed to offer specific advice depending on the length of delay that the incident has caused.

General notes

In all the events covered, Colleges should endeavour to keep all parties (i.e. candidates and examiners) regularly informed.

Any decision to allow a candidate affected by a delay to take the exam in a later slot in the same diet can only be made if it does not adversely impact any other candidate.

Incidents occurring that cause a delay would include events such as fire alarms, power cuts, and examiner/actor/candidate illness or accident.

Reasons that an examiner may be unable to complete a station would include if they are taken ill or called away urgently.

Major incidents that might affect the exam following the completion of an exam circuit would involve the loss of exam result data. For future reference, any electronic marking solutions for the MRCS OSCE should have suitable back-up plans in place to prevent data loss.

If an event occurs that is outside of a candidate's control on the day of or the day before the exam (e.g. extreme weather, train strikes), and the whole/majority of the candidature is affected, the affected candidates should be refunded if they are unable to attend.

The advice in this protocol is designed to guide College staff and Supervising examiners in their decision-making in the event that any of the specified incidents occur. In all cases, an incident report should be completed at the time of the incident.

1. An incident occurs that causes a delayed start to the exam

1.1 Delay lasts up to one hour

The exam should continue as planned. Candidates should not be offered refunds if they are unable to complete the exam. If the delay has happened before the morning session of the exam and there will be another session of the exam in the afternoon, the afternoon session will begin with a delayed start.

1.2 Delay lasts between one and two hours

The Supervising Examiner should use their discretion as to whether to cancel the exam. The examiners would need to be consulted, and if not enough are able to stay to have enough to run the exam, the circuit should be cancelled and candidates should get a refund.

If the exam continues after the delay, candidates should be told that they can leave and get a refund if they wish. If they choose to continue, the delay cannot be used as the basis for an appeal.

1.3 Delay is greater than two hours and takes place in the morning session of the exam and there is due to be an afternoon session as well

The morning session should be cancelled. As mentioned above, any decision to allow a candidate affected by a delay to take the exam in a later slot in the same diet can only be made if it does not adversely impact any other candidate. If the candidate cannot be offered a later slot in the same diet, the attempt should be expunged and the candidate should be refunded.

1.4 Delay is greater than two hours and takes place in either the afternoon session of the exam, or in the morning session of the exam when there is no afternoon session that day

The Supervising Examiner should use their discretion as to whether to cancel the exam. The examiners would need to be consulted, and if not enough are able to stay to have enough to run the exam, the circuit should be cancelled and candidates should get a refund.

If the exam continues after the delay, candidates should be told that they can leave and get a refund if they wish. If they choose to continue, the delay cannot be used as the basis for an appeal.

Notes

- In the event of a second incident in the same exam session causing an additional delay (such as a recurring power cut) once the exam has started, the timer for the delay would in essence be continued from the length of the previous delay, with the rules above about continuing or stopping being applied to the combined length of delay.

2. An incident occurs after the exam has started that causes a stoppage and subsequent delay

2.1 Delay lasts up to one hour

The exam should continue as planned. Candidates should not be offered refunds if they are unable to complete the exam. If the delay has happened before the morning session of the exam and there will be another session of the exam in the afternoon, the afternoon session will begin with a delayed start.

2.2 Delay lasts between one and two hours

If the delay lasts between one and two hours, the Supervising Examiner should use their discretion as to whether to cancel the exam. The examiners would need to be consulted, and if not enough are able to stay to have enough to run the exam, the circuit should be cancelled and candidates should get a refund.

If the exam continues after the delay, candidates should be told that they can leave and get a refund if they wish. If they choose to continue, the delay cannot be used as the basis for an appeal.

2.3 Delay is greater than two hours and takes place in the morning session of the exam and there is due to be an afternoon session as well

The morning session should be cancelled. As mentioned above, any decision to allow a candidate affected by a delay to take the exam in a later slot in the same diet can only be made if it does not adversely impact any other candidate. If the candidate cannot be offered a later slot in the same diet, the attempt should be expunged and the candidate should be refunded.

2.4 Delay is greater than two hours and takes place in either the afternoon session of the exam, or in the morning session of the exam when there is no afternoon session that day

The Supervising Examiner should use their discretion as to whether to cancel the exam. The examiners would need to be consulted, and if not enough are able to stay to have enough to run the exam, the circuit should be cancelled and candidates should get a refund.

If the exam continues after the delay, candidates should be told that they can leave and get a refund if they wish. If they choose to continue, the delay cannot be used as the basis for an appeal.

Notes

- In the event of a second incident in the same exam session causing an additional delay (such as a recurring power cut), the timer for the delay would in essence be continued from the length of the previous delay, with the rules above about continuing or stopping being applied to the combined length of delay.
- The rules about stopping a circuit apply if 1 or 17, or anywhere in between, of the 18 stations in the exam have been completed. It is then an issue to be decided at the standard-setting.

3. Actions if an examiner is unable to complete a station for whatever reason

3.1 If it is a clinical examiner

They should be replaced with a spare examiner, or the Supervising Examiner, or an Assessor, in that order of preference. Assessors will not need to have a licence to practise in order to examine in such extenuating circumstances.

3.2 If it is a lay examiner

Colleges should endeavour to have trained members of their staff as lay examiners so that they can fill in. Colleges should routinely train members of their staff to be lay examiners so that they can fulfil this role.

If there is no spare lay examiner, the station should be closed down and removed from the circuit for the remaining candidates. Clinical examiners may not stand in as lay examiners. The interpretation of the results would be at the discretion of the standard-setting committee. All candidates should be openly informed about the incident and actions taken.

Notes

For the candidate in the station when an examiner is unable to complete examining it, the candidate should be given the opportunity to re-sit the station and be told that it is the mark from the second attempt at the station that would apply to their overall score.

The rules regarding the length of delay caused by the incident as detailed in section 2 will apply to this form of incident.

4. An incident occurs after the exam has finished

4.1 Total loss of exam result data

The attempt should be expunged from the affected candidates' records. Refunds or free attempts should be offered to the affected candidates.

4.2 Partial loss of exam result data

The result would stand for unaffected candidates. Affected candidates should be informed, the attempt expunged and a refund or free attempt offered. All attempts should be made to recover any lost data.

5. Suggestions to help Colleges and Supervising examiners prevent major incidents from occurring, or mitigate their impact

The working group made a number of other suggestions to help Colleges and Supervising examiners prevent major incidents from occurring, or mitigate their impact.

- 5.1** Candidates should be told the minimum length the exam will take from registration to departure (roughly five hours) and that, in extreme circumstances, it may last an additional hour. Candidates should consider this when booking travel.
- 5.2** If a Supervising Examiner is made aware of potential candidate dissemination/pre-knowledge of exam material during an exam session, they should allow the exam to continue and report the incident to ICBSE for investigation.
- 5.3** If it is alleged that an examiner has behaved inappropriately through a complaint by a candidate, such a complaint should be investigated as soon as possible, through discussion with the examiner, assessors and members of staff. No action, such as an offer for the candidate who raised the complaint to retake the station with a different examiner, should be taken until the investigation is complete.
- 5.4** In the event of the outcome of the investigation being that an examiner has been behaving inappropriately, and that examiner is then removed or told to moderate their behaviour, candidates examined by the examiner while they were behaving inappropriately should be given the opportunity to retake the station at the end of the circuit, if it is recognised in time. If it is discovered after the exam has been completed and candidates have left the exam centre, affected candidates should be informed and it should be taken into account at the standard-setting.
- 5.5** If a Supervising Examiner is incapacitated or has to leave the exam venue for any reason, they should be replaced with the next most senior examiner.
- 5.6** If an Assessor is incapacitated or has to leave the exam venue for any reason, the exam could continue as planned.
- 5.7** In the event of long delays, reasonable attempts should be made to keep candidates and examiners comfortable (provision of water, toilet breaks etc.)
- 5.8** The above guidance applies to exams in both the UK and Ireland, as well as in international centres.
- 5.9** If a College is examining in a country overseas and Foreign Office advice changes to instruct people to leave the country, that advice should be followed.
- 5.10** In the event of an incident occurring that is not covered by the above guidance, reasonable attempts should be made to address the situation and a report should be submitted for consideration at the standard setting.

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30 January 2023