

James Gillespie's
High School
Parent Council



James Gillespie's High School Parent Council
c/o James Gillespie's High School
120 Warrender Park Road
Edinburgh
EH9 1DD

23 January 2025

Mr Neil Rennick
Director-General Education and Justice
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Subject: Request for Intervention Regarding SQA Timetable for Higher English and Higher Psychology Examinations

Dear Mr Rennick,

We are writing on behalf of the Parent Council at James Gillespie's High School to express our concern regarding the scheduling of this year's Higher examinations by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). We would be grateful if you could intervene with the SQA to address this issue before it impacts our students.

As you are aware, Higher-level qualifications are of critical importance to students, many of whom rely on their results to gain entry to universities and other post-school opportunities. These qualifications are assessed primarily through examinations, which makes this exam period particularly demanding for our pupils.

However, many students were dismayed to discover that the SQA has scheduled both Higher English and Higher Psychology examinations for the same day, Wednesday 7 May, with only a short break in between. The Higher English exam consists of two separate 90-minute papers in the morning, while the Higher Psychology exam, a 120-minute paper, is scheduled for 1.30 pm on the same day. Both exams require significant writing and mental effort.

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A substantial number of students, including over 115 at James Gillespie's High School, are taking both English and Psychology at Higher level this year. This scheduling decision places undue stress on these students, who are already juggling the considerable demands of preparing for two challenging exams. Given the preparation and memorisation required for both subjects, this clash makes it extremely difficult for them to perform to the best of their ability.

Furthermore, this arrangement disproportionately impacts students who require extra time in exams, or who have other support needs, raising serious concerns about fairness and equal opportunity. To our knowledge, no such co-scheduling of widely studied subjects has occurred in previous years, which makes this situation even more troubling.

In November, the Parent Council raised this issue with school management, who, we understand, reached out to the SQA. However, no changes have been proposed thus far to alleviate the concerns about student well-being and performance.

We respectfully ask for your assistance in raising this issue with the SQA as a matter of urgency, while there is still time to make adjustments. Specifically, we are:

1. Requesting that the timetable be revised so that Higher English is not co-scheduled with any other Higher exam.
2. Proposing that the revised timetable should make use of the SQA contingency day to prevent any further co-scheduling clashes, thereby avoiding any negative impact on other pupils.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and thank you for any support you can provide.

Yours most sincerely,

Hilary Snaith and Tiziana Basciani

Co-chairs, James Gillespie's High School Parent Council