**Alternative Venues Notes & Requirements**

If a learner needs to sit an external assessment at another venue that is not an approved centre (either within or outwith Scotland), we need to know in advance, so we can consider the request and ensure that the appropriate examination stationery, question paper and a trained SQA appointed invigilator are in place.

All alternative venue invigilators must be contracted by SQA. They must be fully trained in invigilation procedures.

If requesting an alternative venue within Scotland, please see section A. If requesting a venue outside Scotland, please see section B.

To seek approval for an alternative venue request, complete an Alternative Venue Request Form and submit it for consideration to the Assessment Arrangements team. All requests must be submitted by 12 March 2024.

The form can be found at [www.sqa.org.uk/examsupport](http://www.sqa.org.uk/examsupport). Completed forms must be e-mailed to [alternative.venues@sqa.org.uk](mailto:alternative.venues@sqa.org.uk).

**Section A - Alternative Venue invigilation requirements** **– Within Scotland**

Requests for an alternative venue **within Scotland** may be considered where learners need to sit their exams:

* in a non-presenting centre or education setting
* in hospital
* in a residential secure unit or prison
* at another campus of a college
  + in their own home
  + in other suitable accommodation.

Centres are under no obligation to support requests from learners where they do not believe there is a compelling justification.

The centre is responsible for ensuring the suitability of the venue for conducting the examination, and for safeguarding the health and wellbeing of learners, invigilators and any other personnel present. As part of this, you must consider whether a member of centre staff should accompany the invigilator.

**Centre preparation:**

The centre must conduct a risk assessment for the alternative venue. As part of your risk assessment, you should consider the following:

* + Invigilator travel to and from the alternative venue
  + Access to alternative venue – entrance/exit /access via stairs/lifts
  + Suitability of the examination space:
    - well lit
    - quiet and comfortable
    - have a suitable desk(s) or table(s) and seat(s)
    - not overlooked
    - there is enough room for the invigilator and learners (allowing at least 1.25m between desks if there is more than one learner)
    - free from potential distractions (eg maps or diagrams on the walls)
  + Arrangements for other individuals in the building housing the alternative venue (eg if at the home, any other household members/pets)
  + Health and wellbeing of the invigilator
  + Safety of invigilator – risk of violence (verbal or physical)

You should also:

* discuss with the learner and/or their representative the arrangements for the exam and ensure they are fully aware of arrangements
* ensure that the invigilator and any centre staff are aware of the learner’s situation, the alternative venue environment and are content to carry out the invigilation
* ensure that the invigilator is fully trained and understands all procedures related to the secure conduct of the examination – including awareness of emergency procedures
* ensure the invigilator is aware of any agreed assessment arrangements for the learner
* ensure the invigilator is aware that they can politely end the examination if at any time they feel uncomfortable with the arrangements, return to the centre and inform the Chief Invigilator and SQA’s invigilator helpdesk (0345 213 6862)
* if there are any additional risks in relation to conducting the examination (for example for an immunocompromised learner), any mitigations should be agreed in advance (see examples below)
* ensure the invigilator is aware of and able to implement any measures required to reduce any risks identified

**Invigilator guidance for at-risk learners:**

It is sometimes the case that if a learner has a need to sit an examination at an alternative venue (particularly at their own home) that they may have a disability or health condition that makes them especially vulnerable to infectious diseases such as Covid.

To mitigate the risk of spread of infectious diseases, invigilators should adopt any reasonable mitigations where these are agreed in advance, for example:

* wear personal protective equipment (PPE) (face covering and gloves)
* maintain at least one metre social distancing at all times
* sanitise hands regularly, wear disposable gloves if handling materials

**Ensuring invigilators are prepared**

In advance of the exam, you should seek confirmation that the invigilator:

* has a mobile phone and has the contact details for the centre contact, the Chief Invigilator and SQA’s invigilator helpdesk (0345 213 6862)
* has all necessary examination materials
* is aware of any agreed assessment arrangements
* for at-risk learners:
  + does not have a cough or cold symptoms
  + is aware of the agreed preventative measures and has all precautionary items required (eg face covering, gloves)

**Section B - Alternative Venue invigilation requirements** **– Outwith Scotland**

Requests for an alternative venue **outwith** Scotland are normally only approved if the learner:

* has undertaken the course but has moved to live outside Scotland before sitting the timetabled examination
* is representing their country in a sporting or cultural event
* is taking part in an activity that is essential to their career aspirations that **cannot be rescheduled**

The centre must ensure that there is a compelling reason, which they fully support, before submitting a request form with all the information. Please note that the criteria above, which apply in 2023/24, may change for future sessions.

Centres are responsible for ensuring the security of exam materials during transit and storage before, during and after the exam at the location outside Scotland.

The centre is responsible for conducting risk assessments regarding the suitability of the venue for conducting the examination, and for safeguarding the health and wellbeing of learners and invigilators present.

By submitting a request to conduct exams in alternative venue outside Scotland, you are confirming that a risk assessment has been undertaken by the centre and that appropriate preparations have been undertaken to ensure that arrangements are in place to allow the examination to proceed securely and safely.

**Centre preparation:**

The centre must conduct a risk assessment for the alternative venue. As part of your risk assessment, you should consider the following:

* + Security of the exam materials during transit
  + Security of the exam materials before, during and after the exam at the location outside Scotland
  + Suitability of the examination space:
    - well lit
    - quiet and comfortable
    - have a suitable desk(s) or table(s) and seat(s)
    - not overlooked
    - there is enough room for the invigilator and learners (allowing at least 1.25m between desks if there is more than one learner)
    - free from potential distractions (eg maps or diagrams on the walls)
  + Access to alternative venue – entrance/exit /access via stairs/lifts
  + Suitability of accommodation arrangements for the examination and secure storage of exam materials
  + Health and wellbeing of the invigilator
  + Safety of invigilator – risk of violence (verbal or physical)

You should also:

* ensure the invigilator is aware of requirements, as laid out in the handbook for invigilators, for keeping the exam materials secure during transit and while at the alternative venue
* ensure that the invigilator is aware of the learner’s situation, the alternative venue environment and are content to carry out the invigilation
* ensure that the invigilator is fully trained and understands all procedures related to the secure conduct of the examination
* ensure the invigilator is aware of any agreed assessment arrangements for the learner
* ensure the invigilator is aware that they can politely end the examination if at any time they feel uncomfortable with the arrangements and inform the Chief Invigilator and SQA’s invigilator helpdesk (0345 213 6862)
* discuss with the learner and/or their representative the arrangements for the exam and ensure they are fully aware of arrangements

**Secure handling of exam materials while in transit:**

All exam materials must be:

* transported securely in a private vehicle or in hand luggage on public transport, by the named invigilator only
* never left unattended by the responsible invigilator while in transit

**Secure handling of exam materials while in situ at location outside Scotland and getting exam materials to the exam room**

All exam materials must be:

* transferred immediately to a secure storage facility, for example a safe, cabinet or a secure room to which only the appointed individual has access
* removed from the secure cabinet or safe no more than 60 minutes before the agreed starting time of the exam and held securely until transfer to the exam room
* Before leaving the secure storage facility, the invigilator must check they have the correct packet for the exam (ie correct subject, level, question paper, date, and time)
* transported securely when exam materials are being carried between the secure storage facility and the alternative venue exam room

**Ensuring invigilators are prepared**

In advance of the exam, you should seek confirmation that the invigilator:

* has access to a phone and has the contact details for the centre, the Chief Invigilator and SQA’s invigilator helpdesk (0345 213 6862)
* has all necessary examination materials
* is aware of the start and end times for the exam, which are the British Summer Time (BST) times published in the [exam timetable](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/1439.html)
* is aware of any agreed assessment arrangements

The invigilator must be present in the alternative venue room at all times. The exam materials must never be left unattended.

SQA are planning to trial the use of remote invigilation to support in-person invigilation for alternative venues. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact [alternative.venues@sqa.org.uk](mailto:alternative.venues@sqa.org.uk).