

Adverse Circumstances Support Policy

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Why do we need this policy?

It sets out our Adverse Circumstances Support (ACS) for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses at SCQF levels 5 to 7.

This policy applies to non-question paper, externally assessed components only. For question paper components, refer to our Examination Exceptional Circumstances Considerations Service (EECCS) policy.

Who is it for?

This policy is for anyone in Qualifications Scotland involved in ACS. It's also a reference document for centres, parents, learners and other key organisations interested in ACS.

What support is available?

Our National Qualifications Policy Team can provide support on how to implement this policy.

Policy

1 Policy statement

This document sets out the policy for Adverse Circumstances Support (ACS) for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. The main points are as follows:

- ACS is for non-question paper components, externally assessed by Qualifications Scotland. This includes assignments, projects and practical activities.
- ACS applies when circumstances outside a learner's control affect their external assessment and standard adjustments (such as rescheduling or extensions) are not possible.

ACS covers situations where an adverse circumstance has a detrimental impact on a learner's performance. Examples of adverse circumstances include:

- Medical or personal reasons — for example, when illness or bereavement prevents a learner from completing coursework, and a normal extension is not possible.
- Significant disturbances or interruptions during a non-timetabled assessment — for example, when a visiting assessment is seriously affected by broken equipment, loud noise or illness, and rescheduling is not possible.

We are committed to equality of opportunity and to a culture that respects difference. We believe that, as an employer and public body, we can play a leading part in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion by making them an integral part of our decision making. At the development stage, we completed an Equality Impact Assessment to see how this policy might impact on equality groups, and the findings from this are reflected in this policy.

2 Policy relationship to our Governing Principles

Qualifications Scotland's Governing Principles determine how we meet our statutory duties and self-regulates our activities.

This policy supports and is supported by:

Governing Principle 6

Qualifications Scotland will work in partnership with its appointees and centres to ensure that all assessments used in its qualifications are valid and reliable.

Governing Principle 7

Qualifications Scotland will ensure that all qualifications and assessments are as fair and accessible as possible and that the needs of candidates are met in the management of its assessments.

Governing Principle for awarding 10

Qualifications Scotland will ensure that candidates receive accurate results in the stated timeframe.

3 Policy requirements

3.1 Eligibility

To be eligible, a learner must have:

- experienced an adverse circumstance when completing a non-question paper external assessment, that standard adjustments cannot address
- an estimated grade from their centre
- relevant alternative evidence available

3.2 Submitting a request

A learner who thinks they are eligible for ACS can ask their centre to submit a request on their behalf. Before doing so, centres must explain the eligibility conditions to the learner and get their consent.

We do not accept requests sent directly from learners or parents.

3.3 Reviewing requests

A request must meet the eligibility criteria before we forward it to a senior examiner for review. We provide them with the learner's estimate, alternative academic evidence and any other relevant materials.

The examiner awards a grade based on the following conditions:

- If the learner did not attend and/or complete any parts of the external assessment, and therefore only alternative academic evidence is available, any grade awarded will be at the lowest band point available, for example, A2, B4 or C6.
- If the learner has a conditional offer from university that requires an A1 band, and their alternative evidence justifies an A grade, the reviewer will also decide the appropriate band. These cases are by exception.

Senior examiners carry out a full review based on the standard of the learner's evidence. The grade awarded may not be the same as the centre's estimate.

ACS usually takes place before Results Day. In rare cases, we may consider a late submission, for example if a learner experienced an adverse circumstance when completing a non-question paper external assessment and only communicates this after Results Day.

3.4 ACS results

We issue the results of ACS reviews using the established national certification channels and according to the published dates (with the exception of late submissions).

3.5 Appeals Service

A learner who has requested support for an adverse circumstance cannot use the Appeals Service for the same qualification in the same year. This is because the ACS already includes a marking review of all externally assessed components related to the request.

4 ACS appeals

A centre can appeal on a learner's behalf if they believe something went wrong in the way Qualifications Scotland handled the ACS request and this led to an incorrect decision based on the evidence available at the time.

5 Associated policies and legislation

- Qualifications Scotland's *Appeals Service for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses at SCQF Levels 5 to 7*
- Qualifications Scotland's *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service*