

Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service Policy

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Why do we need this policy?

It sets out the policy for the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses at SCQF levels 5 to 7.

Who is it for?

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

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 the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. The main points are as follows:

- The EECCS supports learners who are unable to attend a Qualifications Scotland exam, or whose performance in the exam may have been affected by a personal circumstance, examination circumstance, or an unplanned incident on the day.
- There is no charge for the service, and it is available for all exams on the exam timetable.
- It covers situations where an exceptional circumstance may have affected a learner's performance on the day of an exam, or their ability to attend an exam. Disruption to learning that does not occur at the time of an exam is not considered a valid exceptional circumstance.
- It is not a learner-direct service. It is the responsibility of the head of centre to use their professional judgement to decide if an EECCS request should be submitted. Qualifications Scotland will not make the decision on whether to submit a request. The decision lies with the head of centre.

Principles

A number of key principles and aims underpin the EECCS. These must be followed without exception when offering the EECCS:

Fairness — the service should ensure fairness to learners who access the service, as well as to those who do not. It should not give an unfair advantage.

Demonstrate attainment — a qualification grade should always be based on direct evidence of knowledge, understanding and skills (demonstrated attainment).

Externality — a subject expert, trained and monitored by Qualifications Scotland, should review all evidence against the national standard to provide necessary externality to the grading process.

Uphold the importance of exams — the service should not undermine the importance of taking exams. Exams provide a standardised assessment and controlled environment to support fairness and reliability.

Manageability and deliverability — the service should be delivered within the necessary timelines. This includes Qualifications Scotland's processes, recruitment of appointees and centres transferring alternative academic evidence to Qualifications Scotland.

Credibility of results — the service should deliver results that maintain confidence in the system, both at an individual level and at a system level.

Empathy — the service supports and is supported by the right attitudes and behaviours.

We developed the EECCS through extensive consultation with stakeholders, and it is designed to complement our Appeals Service.

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 are reflected in this policy.

2 Policy relationship to Governing Principles

Qualifications Scotland's Governing Principles govern how we meet our statutory duties and self-regulate 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 11

Qualifications Scotland will work in partnership with centres to ensure that the standards of its qualifications are consistently monitored and maintained.

3 Responsibilities

Many people and organisations can be involved in the EECCS, such as Qualifications Scotland, learners, centres, colleges, local authorities and the Scottish Council of Independent Schools. You can find more information in the *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service: Information for Centres* document.

4 Policy requirements

4.1 Eligibility

To be eligible, a learner must have:

- experienced a valid exceptional circumstance
- completed all the compulsory non-question paper component(s), such as assignment, performance, practical activity
- an estimated grade previously submitted by their centre
- alternative evidence available for the affected exam component(s)

4.2 Which assessment components are eligible?

The service is carried out before we issue certificates and covers situations where an exceptional circumstance may have affected a learner's performance **on the day of an exam**.

The service does not cover non-question paper components. Existing arrangements for non-question paper components allow enough flexibility for learners who are unable to meet submission dates or unable to attend a scheduled visiting assessment.

4.3 What is an exceptional circumstance?

An exceptional circumstance is a situation that is unplanned and fundamentally affects a learner's ability to attend or perform **on the day in an exam**.

It can be a personal circumstance or examination circumstance. These are called **outline reasons**. Under each outline reason there are **detailed reasons**, such as a medical condition or a disruption.

We cannot list every eventuality; however, each request should correspond with one of the following reasons:

Outline reason	Detailed reason
Personal circumstance	Bereavement Medical condition* Domestic circumstance Exceptional absence
Examination circumstance**	Examination arrangements*** Disruption Exam time greater than 6 hours in one day****

* We do not require centres to specify the nature of the medical condition when submitting a request, but they must hold documentation, such as a letter or a statement from the head of centre, confirming that it affected the learner.

** For a situation to be considered an examination-related circumstance, learners must have been affected during the exam by a disruption, or other exam circumstance, reported by the chief invigilator. Our invigilators' handbook sets out the procedures for managing many types of unplanned interruptions or disturbances during exams.

*** Examination-related exceptional circumstances include situations where the centre fails to correctly implement a pre-agreed assessment arrangement.

**** Where the examination circumstance relates to an examination time greater than 6 hours in one day, centres must ensure they have submitted a request for an extra time assessment arrangement or an English as an additional language (EAL) arrangement. The EECCS request must be submitted for the last exam of the day. The 6-hour exam period does not include scheduled breaks between exams.

4.4 Examples of exceptional circumstances

We provide examples of exceptional circumstances in our *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service: Information for Centres* document. These help to provide an understanding of the nature of an exceptional circumstance, rather than representing an exhaustive list. They do not cover all possible scenarios but are intended as supplementary guidance for centres.

4.5 Taking the exam

We always encourage learners to attempt the exam; however, the final decision of whether to take the exam lies with the centre and the learner. If the learner takes the exam, this **will not** prevent centres from submitting an EECCS request on their behalf. Their question paper(s) will form part of the overall evidence that we review.

During an exam, most learners are nervous, and there are likely to be minor distractions from inside and outside the room. These **are not** valid exceptional circumstance reasons.

4.6 Submitting a request

A learner who believes they are eligible for exceptional circumstances has the right to ask their centre to consider submitting a request on their behalf.

Before a request is submitted, the head of centre must use their professional judgement to decide if a learner's performance on the day of the exam has been fundamentally affected by an exceptional circumstance. We do not make this decision on whether to submit a request — it lies with the head of centre and should be based on information provided by Qualifications Scotland. This centre-accessed service helps support fairness of access.

We only accept requests approved by the head of centre. A learner must consent to their centre submitting a request on their behalf. Prior to gaining consent, centres must ensure that they have informed the learner about the eligibility conditions for this service. Qualifications Scotland will not accept requests sent directly from learners or parents.

Before submitting a request, the head of centre must ensure that:

- the reason for the request is exceptional
- the reason for the request falls into one of the categories in the table in section '4.3: What is an exceptional circumstance?' (outline and detailed reasons)
- the learner's performance on the day is likely to have been fundamentally affected by the circumstances
- they hold appropriate documentation to support the request
- alternative evidence for the affected exam component(s) is available
- the learner has completed all non-exam components
- they have submitted an estimate for the learner
- they have read, understood and accepted the terms and conditions for the EECCS

4.7 Academic evidence

Centres must package academic evidence for priority requests separately for learners who have a conditional offer for university, college or employment. This lets us prioritise these learners and manage the volume of requests.

You can find further details about academic evidence and related submission information in the *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service: Information for Centres* document.

4.8 Submission deadlines

Centres must submit requests no later than **10 working days** after the affected exam and provide alternative evidence within **13 working days**.

4.9 Reviewing requests

Experienced examiners review all requests. We provide them with the learner's estimate, any alternative academic evidence, any relevant coursework assessed by Qualifications Scotland (for example, a portfolio or assignment), and any attempted question papers related to the request. We do not give them information about the nature of the request.

These subject experts review the marks for the non-question paper components and any attempted question papers. They then review the alternative academic evidence for the question paper component(s) and make an overall grade judgement, using the following criteria:

- If the learner was absent from the exam, the reviewer makes a holistic grading judgement for the whole qualification, based on the alternative academic evidence for the question paper and the marked non-question paper components.
- If the learner completed the question paper, or any part of it, the reviewer determines whether the alternative academic evidence or the attempted question paper demonstrates a higher grade:

- If the alternative academic evidence is of a higher standard, the reviewer makes a holistic grading judgement for the whole qualification, based on that and the marked non-question paper components.
- If the alternative academic evidence is of a lower or equivalent standard to that demonstrated in the attempted question paper, the overall grade is based on the marked course components.
- Although we include centre estimates during the review process, we determine the final grade using the assessment evidence available.

The examiner awards a grade based on the following conditions:

1. If the learner attended the exam, the reviewer could award any grade and band.
2. If the learner did not attend and/or complete any parts of the timetabled exam, 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.
3. 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.
4. The grade awarded may not be the same as the centre's estimate. Regardless of the estimated grade the centre submits for a learner, a full review of their evidence is carried out by subject experts during the EECCS process.

A learner who has requested exceptional circumstances consideration is excluded from the Appeals Service for the same qualification in the same year. This is because the EECCS already includes a marking review of all externally assessed components related to the request.

4.10 EECCS results

We issue the results of EECCS reviews using the established national certification channels and according to the published dates.

We do not provide component marks but make an overall judgement of the grade based on the entirety of the evidence available. A learner will still have component marks detailed for all compulsory components and for the exam (if attempted) as awarded during initial marking, prior to the EECCS review.

If the result is below the centre's estimate, we provide feedback two days after Results Day. We only provide feedback in these cases, and it is limited to high-level statements — for example, 'demonstrated attainment was less than the estimated grade.'

4.11 Supporting documentation and centre retention

Centres must hold the learner's written consent and the appropriate documentation for each request to authenticate and support the exceptional circumstance. They must also keep a copy of the alternative academic evidence they submit.

Centres must keep the documentation in line with their own retention policies and at least until the end of December in the same year. This supports Qualification Scotland's quality assurance activity. Centres must keep documentation in case of:

- any EECCS appeals submitted to Qualifications Scotland
- any complaints raised with the centre, Qualifications Scotland and/or the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

To support learners' rights, it may be necessary for centres to retain materials beyond December.

4.12 Quality assurance

All centres using the EECCS are subject to our quality assurance process. We carry out checks to ensure that the EECCS is used fairly and consistently across all centres, to support learners and maintain the confidence of education professionals, learners and parents. As part of this process, centres must submit supporting documentation and evidence when requested.

4.13 Retaining and returning evidence

Qualifications Scotland must retain EECCS evidence for a period of at least 12 months from the date of certification, before returning it to centres. This is in case there are any appeals or complaints.

Centres can ask us to return evidence by completing the EECCS Evidence Request form in the *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service: Information for Centres* document and paying the relevant charge. We return evidence to the centre — we do not send it directly to the learner.

5 EECCS appeals

The head of centre can appeal on a learner's behalf if they believe that:

- Qualifications Scotland's decision to refuse an EECCS request, submitted within the published timescales and based on all the evidence available to Qualifications Scotland at the time, was incorrect
- or
- there was a procedural irregularity in Qualification Scotland's handling of an EECCS request which contributed to a decision that, based on the evidence available to Qualifications Scotland at the time, was incorrect

You can find further information about EECCS appeals in the *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service: Information for Centres* document.

6 Associated policies and legislation

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