



Policy: Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service

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Equality impact assessment (EqIA) date	Equality and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments for <i>the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service</i> were developed in parallel with the decision-making process. The equalities and children's rights impacts, both positive and negative, were considered as far as possible. The impact assessments were published on SQA's website on 7 March 2024 and can be found here .

Why do we need the policy?

This document sets out the policy for the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Courses.

What does it apply to?

This policy applies to National Qualifications at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

Who is it for?

All parts of the organisation involved in the delivery of the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service.

What support is available?

The NQ policy team can provide support on implementing this policy.

1 Policy statement

This document sets out the policy for the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Service (EECCS).

The Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service supports learners who have been unable to attend an examination or learners whose performance in the examination may have been affected by a personal circumstance, or an unplanned incident on the day. There is no charge for this service, and it is available for all examinations that appear in the examination timetable.

The Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service covers situations where an exceptional circumstance may have impacted a learner's performance on the day of an examination or ability to attend an examination. Disruption to learning that does not occur at the time of an examination, is not considered a valid exceptional circumstance.

This is not a learner direct service. It is the responsibility of the head of centre to use their professional judgement to determine whether a candidate's non-attendance at an exam is the result of an exceptional circumstance. SQA will not make the decision on whether to submit a request. This decision lies with the head of centre.

Principles

A number of key principles / aims underpin the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Service. These principles and aims must be pursued, none can be demoted or ignored in offering the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service.

- **Fairness** – any service should seek to ensure fairness both to those learners who access the service as well as to those who do not. In other words, it should not confer an unfair advantage.
- **Demonstrated attainment** – a qualification grade should always be based upon direct evidence of knowledge, understanding and skills ie demonstrated attainment.
- **Externality** – regardless of the route to the grade, an appointee, trained and monitored by SQA, should review the evidence submitted with requests to use this service, against the National standard.
- **Uphold the primacy of taking examinations** – the central assumption of examinations should not be undermined through offering this service. Eligible courses have been designed to have at least one examination component (validity) and these examinations provide a standardised assessment and controlled environment to support fairness and reliability.
- **Manageability and deliverability** – any services should be deliverable by the system in the necessary timelines, including SQA processes, recruitment of appointees, and centres in transferring alternative academic evidence to SQA.
- **Credibility of results** – this service should deliver results that command the confidence of the system, both at individual level and also at a system level.
- **Empathy** - this service supports and is supported by the right attitudes and behaviours

2 Policy relationship to SQA's governing principles

[SQA's Governing Principles](#) govern how SQA meets its statutory duties and self-regulates its activities. The policy on the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service supports and is supported by, in particular:

Governing Principle 6

SQA 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

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

Governing Principle 11

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

3 Responsibilities

There are roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service across SQA and centres and learners, and the wider system including Local Authorities, Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) and colleges. Further information is detailed within the *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service Centre Guidance*.

4 Overall approach

The Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service has been developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders and is designed to complement SQA's Appeals service.

Eligibility

All learners are eligible for the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service where:

- they have experienced a valid exceptional circumstance
- they have completed all the compulsory non-question paper components
- an estimate has been submitted for them
- alternative evidence for the impacted examination components is available.

Which assessment components are eligible for the service?

This is a pre-certification service that covers situations where an exceptional circumstance may have impacted a learner's performance **on the day of an examination**. Non-question paper components are not covered by the service. Existing arrangements for these allow enough flexibility for learners who are unable to meet submission dates or attend a scheduled visiting assessment.

What is an exceptional circumstance?

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

Exceptional circumstances are categorised as personal circumstances or examination circumstances. These are called **outline reasons**. Under each outline reason there are **detailed reasons**, such as a medical condition or a disruption.

It is not possible to produce a definitive list that covers every possible exceptional circumstance. However, each request submitted should correspond with one of the following reasons.

Outline reason	Detailed reason
Personal circumstance	Bereavement Medical condition* Domestic circumstance Exceptional absence
Outline reason	Detailed reason
Examination circumstance**	Examination arrangements*** Disruption

Current public health advice in Scotland does not require a period of COVID-19 self-isolation. Disruption **at the time of examination**, caused by COVID-19, or related COVID-19 conditions, should be recorded using the detailed reason of medical condition, as appropriate to the circumstances.

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

** To be considered for an Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service request due to examination related circumstances learners must have been affected during the exam by a disruption, or other exam circumstance, reported by the chief invigilator. SQA's *Handbook for Invigilators* sets out the procedures for invigilators to manage many types of unplanned interruption or disturbances during exams.

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

Examples of exceptional circumstances

Examples of exceptional circumstances are provided in the *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service Centre Guidance*. The examples given are intended 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 rather are intended only as supplementary guidance for centres.

Sitting the examination

SQA encourages learners to attempt the examination where possible. However, the final decision lies with the centre and the learner. If the learner does sit the examination, this would not preclude them from having an Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service request submitted on their behalf. Their examination papers would form part of the overall evidence that examiners would review.

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

Submitting an Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service request

All learners who believe they are eligible for exceptional circumstances have the right to request that their centre considers submitting a request on their behalf.

Before a request is submitted, the head of centre must use their professional judgement to determine whether a learner's performance on the day of an examination has been fundamentally affected by an exceptional circumstance. SQA will not make the decision on whether to submit a request. This decision lies with the head of centre and should be based on guidance provided by SQA. This is a centre accessed service to help support fairness of access.

Only requests that have been approved by the head of centre will be accepted by SQA. Learners must consent to a request being submitted on their behalf to SQA. Prior to gaining a learner's consent, centres must ensure that they have informed learners of the eligibility conditions related to the use of this service. Requests sent directly from learners or parents will **not** be accepted by SQA.

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 (outline and detailed reasons)
- the learner's performance on the day is likely to have been fundamentally affected by the circumstances
- appropriate documentation is held to support the request
- alternative evidence for the impacted examination components is available
- all non-exam components were completed by the learner
- an estimate has been submitted
- they have read, understood and accepted the terms and conditions for the EECCS.

Academic evidence

Evidence for any priority learners who have a conditional offer for university, college or employment, must be packaged separately by centres to enable SQA to prioritise these learners, as part of a strategy to manage the volume of EECCS requests, if required.

Further detail regarding academic evidence and related submission information can be found in the *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service Centre Guidance*.

Submission deadlines

Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service requests must be submitted no later than **10 working days** after the exam affected, and alternative evidence must be provided within **13 working days** of the exam affected.

How EECCS requests are reviewed

Examiners will be provided with the learner's estimate, alternative academic evidence, any relevant non-question paper component learner materials (for example a folio or project), and any attempted question papers related to the request.

Examiners will review the academic evidence and award a grade subject to the following conditions:

- Where the learner has not managed to 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.
- If a learner has a conditional offer from university that requires an A1 band, in these cases, by exception, should the learner's alternative evidence justify an A grade, the appointee will also determine the appropriate band.
- Component marks will not be provided as they are not an outcome of the EECCS. This is because the alternative academic evidence has not been subject to SQA's usual standardisation procedures.
- In cases where the EECCS outcome is below the estimated grade, SQA will provide feedback.

The grade awarded will be based on the standard of the evidence reviewed as part of the EECCS process, not the grade the learner has been estimated by their centre.

How results are issued

Results will be issued via the normal national certification channels and according to the associated published dates.

Learners who have undergone exceptional circumstances consideration are excluded from Appeals (marking-review) for the same qualification. This is because the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service includes a marking review of any/all submitted external assessments that are related to the request.

Supporting documentation and centre retention

Centres are required to hold the learner's written consent and the appropriate documentation on the circumstance to authenticate/support the exceptional circumstance for each request and a copy of the alternative academic evidence being submitted on behalf of the learner.

Examination circumstances requests must be supported by an Invigilator's Report Form. This must be submitted to SQA along with the alternative academic evidence.

Centres are not required to specify the medical condition when submitting a request, but they must hold documentation such as a letter or statement from the head of centre confirming that it meant that the learner was unable to sit the exam.

Any documentation supporting an Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service request must be retained in accordance with a centre's own retention policies, and at least until the end of December in that calendar year. This will support SQA's quality assurance activity as all centres using the service will be subject to quality assurance checks by SQA and must ensure that supporting documentation/evidence is submitted when requested.

It is also necessary to retain documentation to support learners' rights in relation to:

- any potential EECCS appeals that may be submitted to SQA
- any potential complaints that may be raised with the centre, SQA and/or the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Centres must consider that, in supporting learners' rights, it may be necessary to retain materials beyond December.

Quality assurance

SQA will undertake quality assurance checks to ensure that the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service is used fairly and consistently across all centres, supporting learners and maintaining the confidence of education professionals, learners and parents. As part of this process, supporting documentation/evidence must be submitted by centres when requested by SQA.

SQA Retention and return of academic evidence

SQA must retain evidence for a period of at least 12 months from the date of certification before it can return it to centres, in case there are any appeals or complaints.

The centre can request that evidence is returned using the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service Evidence Request form, and the relevant charge must be paid. The learner's evidence will be returned to the centre. Evidence will not be sent directly to learners.

Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service Appeals

Examination Exceptional Circumstance Consideration Service (EECCS) appeals are available on two possible grounds. Heads of centre can appeal on a learner's behalf if:

- they believe that SQA's decision to refuse an EECCS request that was submitted within the published timescales, based on all the evidence available to SQA at the time, is wrong.

or

- they believe that there was procedural irregularity in SQA's handling of an EECCS request, which contributed to a decision that based on all the evidence available to SQA at the time, is wrong.

Further information regarding Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service Appeals can be found in the *Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service Centre Guidance*.