NQ EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES 2020 – PROPOSAL TO NOT OPEN SERVICE

31 March 2020

1. Background

The Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service supports candidates who have been unable to attend an exam, or those whose performance in the exam may have been affected by a personal circumstance or unplanned incident on the day, which is outwith their control. This service is available for all exams that appear in the exam timetable.

The service was due to open to requests on **9 April 2020** – centres would have ten days after the scheduled examination date to submit requests. This date is published in Key Dates and the SQA website.

This statement about Exceptional Circumstances (EC) was included in the Scottish government and SQA joint statement of 18 March:

> "Our exceptional circumstances service, which allows a school or college who believe that a candidate has suffered, for example bereavement or illness during exams, or has been self-isolating, to inform us of the circumstances and submit alternative evidence of attainment demonstrated by the candidate, will be available.
>
> Schools and colleges should be gathering any alternative evidence on candidate performance as they would do in the normal way, and as per our guidance every year, to support any consideration of exceptional circumstances. There is a range of alternative assessment evidence that we can take into account, which can include coursework, class or other assessments. This evidence should inform estimated grades, again as it should every year."

The examination diet was cancelled on 19 March 2020. In the SQA statement issued on 19 March 2020 we said: "We are considering more fully the impact this decision will have on our exceptional circumstances and post-results services. I will confirm that we will offer a free post-results service to ensure that schools and colleges continue to have a mechanism to question any result".

We therefore need to provide clarity about the impact of this decision on the availability of this service.

2. Considerations

1. EC is a pre-certification service that ensures that candidates affected in a timetabled examination by personal circumstances beyond their control, or unplanned incidents on the day of an exam, receive the results their performance merits on results day. Its role in this respect has been superseded by the Enhanced Estimates Model (EEM).
2. EC requires centres to provide supporting documentation (e.g. invigilator reports; letter from heads of centre) and suitable alternative assessment evidence to SQA.
3. Candidate eligible for EC must have: an entry, an estimate in place and have completed 'compulsory non question paper components' (e.g. coursework component of a two-component qualification)
4. Alternative assessment evidence will generally by stored in centres in hardcopy format. The nature of the evidence will vary greatly depending on the qualification and centres' individual approach to delivery.
5. Alternative evidence that is sent with a valid request to SQA is then given to appointees to review to determine an appropriate result for the candidate, generally in a physical meeting.

6. By its nature, due to the un-standardised nature of evidence provided, EC is resource intensive and requires a high degree of professional judgement - supported by discussion and collaboration with colleagues - to be applied by experienced appointees. Appointees also review statistical evidence (centre concordance) alongside candidate evidence.
7. There is a post-certification EC service, which allows centres to appeal the outcome of a candidate's EC request. Closure of the pre-certification service will mean this is closed too.
8. EC and alternative evidence: these are likely to be synonymous in the minds of some centres; communication about the future of EC should be clear about the implications for retaining and gathering further alternative evidence.

3. Action already taken

The centre-facing guidance 'Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service: information for centres' document due for publication in late March was pulled before publication.

4. Proposed action

Confirm that the existing EC service will not run in 2020, due to the cancelation of the exam diet.

Close the system to stop any EC requests being submitted. Business Systems colleagues have advised that the ECR system can be prevented from opening. They further advise that this should be done in advance of 9 April to enable testing.

As the post-results service offered is likely to use some of the same methodology as EC usually employs (use of alternative evidence), the communication on this topic needs to be very clear to avoid confusion.

5. Proposed Communications

a. General communication should address the following points:

- Confirm closure of the existing EC service for 2020 diet
- Reference post-results service availability – and that details of this service, including information about alternative assessment evidence, will be provided in due course

b. **Response to centre queries**:

"Thank you for your query about Exceptional Circumstances.

I can confirm that because the 2020 examination diet will not take place, the Exception Circumstance service will not run. For more information, see [link to general comms]"

c. **Update to EC webpage and SQA Connect**.

Remove reference to 9 April opening date. Add notice:

"Exceptional Circumstances – 2020 Notice

Please note that, because of the cancellation of the 2020 examinations due to the ongoing situation with COVID-19, the Exceptional Circumstances service will not run in 2020. For more information, see [link to general comms]"

6. Recommendation

The group is asked to confirm that Exceptional Circumstances should not be opened this year and appropriate messages communicated to centres as suggested above.