

Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service:

Information for centres

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Notes

We use the term 'head of centre' throughout this document, though in some centres it may be more appropriate for a senior member of staff to undertake the actions required. Please understand 'head of centre' in this document as meaning 'the head of centre or his or her delegate'. Any delegate acting on the head of centre's behalf must have explicit permission from the head of centre to do so.

We use the term 'working day' throughout this document. Understand 'working day' in this document as referring to week days Monday to Friday (excluding local bank holidays).

This document should be read in conjunction with the *Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service System Guide for centres* (Publication code 6965)

What is the Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service?

The Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service supports candidates who have been unable to attend an examination, or whose performance in the examination may have been affected by a personal circumstance, or an unplanned incident on the day, which is outwith their control. There is no charge for this service, and it is available for all examinations that appear in the examination timetable. The closing date for submitting a request is 10 working days after the exam for which the request is being made.

Who is eligible for the service?

All candidates are eligible for exceptional circumstances consideration where:

- ◆ they have experienced a valid exceptional circumstance
- ◆ they have completed all the compulsory non-question paper components
- ◆ they have had an estimate submitted
- ◆ alternative academic evidence, produced under the correct conditions, is available

This is a pre-certification service. It is not available to candidates who have under-performed in the timetabled exam but have not suffered an exceptional circumstance.

Which qualifications are eligible for exceptional circumstances consideration?

The service covers situations where an exceptional circumstance may have impacted a candidate'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 candidates who are unable to meet submission dates or attend a scheduled visiting assessment. For more information about extensions to submission dates and visiting assessments, please refer to *Delivering National Qualifications: Guide for SQA Co-ordinators 2018–19* (Publication Code BA7735).

What is an exceptional circumstance?

An exceptional circumstance is a circumstance that is unplanned and fundamentally affects a candidate'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

*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 candidate.

Should the candidate sit the examination?

We would always encourage candidates to attempt the examination where possible. However, the final decision lies with the centre and the candidate. If the candidate does sit the examination, this would not preclude them from having an exceptional circumstances consideration request submitted on their behalf. Their examination papers would form part of the overall evidence that examiners would review.

What about exam stress, distraction and loss of concentration?

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

Examples of exceptional circumstances

The following examples are intended to provide an understanding of the exceptional nature of an exceptional circumstance. This is not an exhaustive list and does not cover all possible scenarios, but is intended as guidance for centres.

1. Personal circumstance: bereavement

These requests are likely to follow the death of a close family member or friend.

Example of a valid request:

- ◆ The candidate is sitting four Higher examinations; Mathematics, English, Biology, and Geography. After they sit the third of their examinations (Biology), the candidate

experiences the loss of a close family member.

Although upset, the candidate decides to sit their Geography examination. Despite completing it, the candidate believes their performance on the day was affected by the bereavement. The candidate speaks with their centre and they agree to submit a request for Geography to SQA.

A request could also be submitted if the candidate was too upset to sit the exam.

2. Personal circumstance: medical condition

These requests are likely to be a result of the candidate being incapacitated or unable to attempt the examination as a result of a severe medical condition. Minor ailments are not considered valid for exceptional circumstance consideration.

Examples of valid requests:

- ◆ The candidate is due to sit their English National 5 examination. The day before, the candidate is admitted to hospital with acute appendicitis.

This is a valid reason for exceptional circumstances consideration for the candidate's English examination, as well as any other subsequent exams that they will be unable to sit. It is not a valid reason for exceptional circumstances consideration for any examinations sat before the onset of the appendicitis.

- ◆ The candidate experiences severe vomiting the night before an examination but decides to sit the exam the next morning.

During the exam the candidate's condition significantly worsens and they are unable to complete the paper. This is a valid reason for exceptional circumstances consideration for this exam. It would also be valid if the candidate had managed to complete the exam, despite the condition worsening.

3. Personal circumstance: domestic circumstance

These requests will follow an unexpected circumstance, over which they had no control, pertaining to the candidate's personal life.

Examples of valid requests:

- ◆ The candidate is the victim of a crime shortly before an examination. They manage to complete the examination but are unlikely to have been able to perform to the best of their ability because they were distressed by the events. This is a valid reason for exceptional circumstances consideration. A request would also be valid if the candidate had chosen not to sit the exam, or was unable to complete it.
- ◆ A member of the candidate's immediate family is rushed to hospital the night before the exam with a sudden illness.
- ◆ A member of the candidate's family is suffering from a long-term illness and there is a sudden deterioration in the health of the person during the examination period.

4. Personal circumstance: exceptional absence

Where circumstances are known in advance of the examination, the centre can request arrangements for the candidate to advance or delay the start time.

If alternative arrangements cannot be implemented, an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request can, in some circumstances, be made.

Examples of valid requests:

- ◆ Coincident examination — where a candidate is entered for two qualifications whose examinations times coincide and rescheduling is impractical. For details of what is considered 'impractical', please see 'Coincident examinations' in the *Delivering National Qualifications Guide for SQA Co-ordinators 2018–19*.
- ◆ The candidate is attending court and the date of the hearing cannot be rescheduled.
- ◆ Religious worship where rescheduling is impractical.
- ◆ The candidate has been selected to represent their country at a sporting or cultural event at a national level and arranging an Alternative Venue is impractical.

5. Examination circumstance: examination arrangements

SQA's *Handbook for Invigilators* sets out the procedures for invigilators to manage many types of unplanned interruption or disturbances during examinations. Invigilation teams should use these procedures to minimise any adverse effect on candidate performance, thus avoiding the need to request exceptional circumstances consideration. If, however, the action taken does not fully mitigate against the circumstance, an exceptional circumstances request can be submitted.

Please note: if you believe there is an error in the question paper, you should make contact immediately with SQA's Customer Contact Centre. The error may already be known and will be taken into account during marking — an exceptional circumstances request in these circumstances is not necessary.

Request consideration and submission

Who makes the decision to submit an exceptional circumstances consideration request?

Before a request is submitted, the head of centre must use their professional judgement to determine whether a candidate's performance on the day of an examination has been fundamentally affected by an exceptional circumstance. It is important to note that SQA will not make the decision on whether to submit a request. This decision lies with the head of centre.

When approving an exceptional circumstances consideration request, the head of centre will be prompted to accept the terms and conditions for the use of Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service. These can be viewed via the Results Services online system.

Only requests that have been approved by the head of centre will be accepted by SQA.

Candidates must have consented to a request being submitted on their behalf to SQA.

Requests from candidates or parents will **not** be accepted by SQA.

What needs to be considered before submitting a request?

Before submitting a request the head of centre should ensure that:

- ◆ the reason for the request is exceptional
- ◆ the reason for the request falls into one of the categories (see the table on page 2)
- ◆ the candidate's performance on the day is likely to have been fundamentally affected by the circumstances
- ◆ appropriate documentation is held to support the request
- ◆ alternative academic evidence is available

Supporting documentation and its retention

Centres are required to hold the candidate's written consent and the appropriate documentation on the circumstance to authenticate/support the exceptional circumstance for each request.

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

This table lists the types of documentation that SQA may ask to see. Please note: centres must **not** send personal data about a candidate, such as a medical certificate, unless specifically requested to do so by SQA.

Outline reason	Detailed reason	Supporting documentation
Personal Circumstance	Bereavement	A letter or a statement from the head of centre
Personal circumstance	Medical condition	A letter or a statement from the head of centre
Personal circumstance	Domestic circumstance	A letter or a statement from the head of centre
Personal circumstance	Exceptional absence	A letter or statement from the head of centre, or other documentary evidence
Examination circumstance	Examination arrangements	A copy of the Invigilator Report Form
Examination circumstance	Disruption	A copy of the Invigilator Report Form

The letter or statement should include all the relevant information on how the candidate was affected on the day by the exceptional circumstance.

This list is not intended to specify to centres what they require for their own internal processes to verify an exceptional circumstance, but refers to the documentation that must be submitted to SQA, if requested. Each circumstance is likely to be different, and centres should use their professional judgement to determine what documentation is suitable.

Centres must ensure any documentation supporting an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request is retained in accordance with their own retention policies and at least until the end of December in that calendar year. This will support quality assurance activity undertaken by SQA (see below).

It is also necessary to support candidates' rights in relation to:

- ◆ any potential 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 should consider that, in supporting candidates' rights, it may be necessary to retain materials beyond December.

Quality assurance of use of the service

SQA's quality assurance activities seek to ensure that the service is used fairly and consistently across all centres, supporting candidates and maintaining the confidence of education professionals, candidates and parents. All centres using the service will be subject to quality assurance checks by SQA, and must ensure that supporting documentation/ evidence (see above) is submitted when requested.

Academic evidence

For each request, centres must provide alternative candidate evidence for the relevant qualification. SQA will consider a wide range of candidate evidence. The best evidence usually contains strong predictive value and helps indicate the likely outcome of course assessment. Centres are encouraged to send in a wide range of alternative academic evidence for consideration, not solely a mock test or prelim.

The evidence must demonstrate coverage of the skills, knowledge and understanding required to match the Course Assessment Specification. The candidate must not have had sight of them previously, and the conditions of assessment should be consistent with those of the external assessment.

All academic evidence submitted in support of requests must have been generated **before** the date of the timetabled examination for which the request is made.

Advice to centres around the type of evidence to submit is generic, rather than subject-specific. This ensures that no limitations are placed on the opportunity to award candidates with the appropriate grade.

The following are examples of the types of candidate evidence that could be considered under this service:

- ◆ **Mock test:** A mock test is the most straightforward indicator of likely performance in the question paper. This should predict attainment in all the skills, knowledge, and understanding assessed by the question paper as indicated in the Course Specification Documents and as exemplified in the specimen question paper.
- ◆ **Commercial past papers:** Commercially-produced papers in their entirety will be accepted as the sole evidence supplied, although centres are encouraged to send in all available academic evidence for consideration. Centres may use commercially-produced papers, which were published in previous years, as part of their evidence.
- ◆ **SQA past papers or specimen papers:** An SQA past paper or specimen question paper in its entirety will not be accepted if it is the only evidence submitted as support for an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request. These papers and associated marking instructions are in the public domain and can be accessed by candidates.
- ◆ **Class tests:** A series of marked class tests could be used as an alternative or supplement to mock test or commercial past paper evidence. The tests should reflect the range of question types found in the question paper and be capable of showing different levels of attainment. They should sample the key aspects of the course, and the conditions of assessment should be consistent with those of the external assessment.

If the class tests do not cover sufficient integration, challenge or application, additional evidence will be required to demonstrate the appropriate level of attainment.

- ◆ **Coursework:** This may comprise of a variety of evidence and may have occurred naturally, under different conditions than those set for course assessments. Nevertheless, if these conditions are made clear, attainment under exam conditions may be predictable on the basis of coursework.

The best prediction will be based on a comprehensive assessment covering all areas assessed in the question paper. This does not necessarily mean that every topic in every area needs to be assessed exhaustively. A selection of important and representative questions can give a good indication of likely performance in the final exam.

- ◆ **Unit assessments:** Similar to class tests, unit assessments are useful to supply part of the evidence for the whole course. Evidence must show that the candidate has met the evidence requirements for the outcomes and assessment standards as defined in the unit specification. However, we would require additional evidence showing how far learners are expected to exceed the evidence requirements.
- ◆ **Performance:** In Dance, Drama, and Music, centres are invited to record candidate performances. Where recordings have been made, these should be enclosed with the evidence. The recording of candidate performance is not mandatory evidence.

Submitting academic evidence

Candidate evidence must be received by SQA no later than 13 working days after the examination for which the request is being made.

For each type of evidence, centres must submit the instrument of assessment and marking instructions with the evidence, clearly showing how these have been applied.

- ◆ **Instrument of assessment** — this is the mechanism by which the assessment has been conducted to demonstrate a candidate's knowledge and/or skills.
- ◆ **Marking instructions or marking scheme** — for each type of evidence submitted it is important that the assessment scheme or marking instructions are provided to exemplify the standard for achievement within the centre, showing how the candidate evidence has been marked or measured. Marking instructions or a marking scheme normally indicate the number of marks each question or component of the task attracts. It should also indicate acceptable answers or criteria for awarding marks.

If any evidence submitted is in the medium of Gaelic, this should be indicated on the Flyleaf.

If candidate evidence has already been submitted to SQA for verification, this should be indicated on the Flyleaf.

All components submitted for assessment will form part of the overall evidence that examiners review.

Please Note: If the candidate has attempted any parts of the examination, these should be submitted in the normal way by the invigilator and not along with the alternative evidence.

Evidence should be submitted to:

Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service
Script Management
Scottish Qualifications Authority
Lowden
24 Wester Shawfair
Dalkeith
Midlothian
EH22 1FD

SQA is unable to accept evidence electronically.

Retention and return of academic evidence

SQA must retain evidence for a period of at least 12 months from the date of certification before we can return it to centres. Evidence is retained to facilitate any potential appeals or complaints.

The centre can request that evidence is returned using the Exceptional Circumstances Evidence Request form, and the relevant charge must be paid.

The form and details of the charges for returning different types of evidence are available on our website at www.sqa.org.uk/returnofmaterials. The form must not be sent in the same package as the exceptional circumstances evidence.

Requests for the return of evidence used in support of an exceptional circumstances consideration request in 2019 must be submitted by 30 September 2019. The candidate's evidence will be returned to the centre. Evidence will not be sent directly to candidates.

Invoices can be supplied upon request. Please e-mail the completed request to: return.materials@sqa.org.uk Cheques should be made payable to SQA.

Request forms and payment (if applicable) should be sent to:

Return of Materials Request
Events Servicing
Scottish Qualifications Authority
Lowden
24 Wester Shawfair
Dalkeith
Midlothian
EH22 1FD

How are requests reviewed?

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

They will also be provided with statistical evidence of performance across a centre's cohort in comparison to their estimates. This may be used to supplement the centre's academic evidence.

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

- ◆ Where the candidate 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.
- ◆ Component marks will not be provided. This is because the alternative academic evidence has not been subject to SQA's usual standardisation procedures.
- ◆ No feedback on Examiners' decisions will be provided, including where a 'No Award' is made.

How are results issued?

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

Candidates who have undergone exceptional circumstances consideration are excluded from all Post-results Services for the same qualification. This is because exceptional circumstances consideration includes a marking review of any/all submitted external assessments that are related to the request.

Key dates

Date	Process
9 April 2019	Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service opens.
10 days after first exam – 10 days after last exam	<p>Each qualification will have its own closing date for requests to be made and for evidence to be received at SQA.</p> <p>The closing date for submitting a request is 10 working days after the exam for which the request is being made. The Results Services system has a Closing Date facility which confirms these specific dates. Please refer to the <i>Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service System Guide for centres</i> (Publication Code 6965).</p>
13 days after first exam – 13 days after last exam	The closing date for evidence to be received by SQA in support of a request is 13 working days after the exam for which the request is being made.
1 August 2019	Results advised to centres.
6 August 2019	Candidates receive their results and certificates.
27 August 2019	Any appeals against the grade awarded via Exceptional Circumstances consideration must be received by SQA.
*30 September 2019	Closing date for return-of-evidence requests for evidence submitted in support of an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request

*Evidence may be retained beyond this date if a complaint has been submitted.

If there are any changes to the time-line for advising results of exceptional circumstance consideration requests, SQA will contact centres.

Because of the varied nature of exceptional circumstances, it is not appropriate to set time-limits as to how close an exceptional circumstance must be to the examination day for it to be a valid reason for exceptional circumstances consideration. Centres should be aware that the effects of an exceptional circumstance may be long or short term.

It is, however, important to note that requests must be submitted no later than 10 working days after the examination affected.

Appeals

Heads of centre can appeal on a candidate's behalf if:

- ◆ They believe that SQA's decision to refuse an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request which was submitted within the published timescales, based on all the evidence available to SQA at the time, is wrong.

or

- ◆ They believe that SQA's decision on the grade awarded to a candidate following an exceptional circumstances consideration request, based on all the evidence available to SQA at the time, is wrong.

For details on how to submit an appeal, please refer to SQA's Appeals Process document https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Appeals_Process.pdf

Contact us and further information

For support, and to answer questions regarding Results Services or the information provided in this document, please visit the SQA website, contact the SQA Exceptional Circumstances Helpdesk, or contact your local Liaison Manager (details can be found at www.sqa.org.uk/liaisonteam).

The SQA Exceptional Circumstances Helpdesk is available from 9 April 2019

- ◆ 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday
- ◆ 8.30am to 3.30pm Friday

with the exception of local and bank holidays.

Phone: 0345 213 6640

E-mail: ec.enquiries@sqa.org.uk

Information about Results Services can be found on SQA's website:
www.sqa.org.uk/resultsservices

Please note

SQA Connect is a secure online portal. The SQA Exceptional Circumstances Helpdesk operators do not have the ability to view or access the screens through which centres submit requests. All questions regarding access to SQA Connect should be submitted via e-mail to sqaconnect@sqa.org.uk