



## SQA – Exceptional Circumstances Requests

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The Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service supports candidates who have been unable to attend an externally-assessed timetabled examination, or whose performance in the examination may have been fundamentally affected as a result of an incident beyond their control. It is available for all examinations that appear in the examination timetable and is only applicable before the results are published.

### 1. Who is eligible for the service?

Candidates who have experienced a valid exceptional circumstance, have completed all the compulsory non-question paper components, and have had an estimate submitted can be considered. This service is not available to candidates who may have under-performed in the timetabled exam but have not suffered an exceptional circumstance. It is not available for other Course components as existing arrangements for non-question paper components allow enough flexibility for candidates who are unable to meet submission dates or attend a scheduled visiting assessment.

### 2. What is an exceptional circumstance?

An exceptional circumstance is something that is out of the ordinary and fundamentally affects a candidate's ability to attend or perform in an externally-assessed timetabled exam. Examples could include (but are not limited to):

- Medical conditions
- Bereavements
- Domestic crisis
- Participation in cultural or sporting events at a national or international level

If a candidate has experienced an exceptional circumstance, but their performance has not been affected, then an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request should **not** be submitted.

### 3. Should the candidate sit the exam?

SQA would always encourage candidates to sit the exam where possible, but the final decision lies with the school and the candidate. If the candidate sits the exam, they can still lodge an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request (the exam papers would form part of the overall evidence that examiners would review).

### 4. Exam stress, distraction and loss of concentration

Most candidates will suffer from exam nerves, and during the examination there are likely to be minor distractions from inside and outside the room but these are **not** considered valid exceptional circumstance reasons.

### 5. Time-limits on exceptional circumstances

Requests should be submitted no later than 10 working days after the examination for which the request is being made. The evidence should follow within a further 3 days at the latest.

### 6. Examples of acceptable exceptional circumstances

The following examples hopefully give an understanding of the exceptional nature of an exceptional circumstance. They are not exhaustive, or cover all possible scenarios, but may be helpful:

### 1. Personal (bereavement)

*The candidate is sitting four Higher subjects; Mathematics, English, Biology and Geography.*

*After they sit the third of their subjects (Biology), the candidate experiences the loss of a close family member. Although upset, the candidate still decides to sit their Geography exam. Despite completing the exam, the candidate believes their performance was fundamentally affected by the bereavement. The candidate speaks with their centre and they agree to submit an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request for Geography to SQA. An Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request could also be submitted if the candidate was too upset to sit the exam.*

### 2. Personal (medical)

*(a) The candidate is due to sit their English National 5 exam. The day before the exam the candidate is admitted to hospital with acute appendicitis. The medical condition is of an exceptional nature. An Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request should be submitted by the centre for the candidate's English exam, as well as any other subsequent exams that they will be unable to sit. An Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request should not be submitted for any exam sat prior to the onset of the appendicitis.*

*(b) The night before an exam the candidate experiences a severe stomach complaint, but decides to sit the exam. During the exam the candidate's stomach complaint significantly worsens and they are unable to complete the exam. An Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request should be submitted by the centre for the exam the candidate was unable to complete. A request could also be submitted if the complaint significantly worsened, but the candidate still completed the exam.*

### 3. Personal (domestic)

*(a) The candidate is the victim of a reportable crime shortly before an exam. The candidate decides to sit the exam, which they complete. However, they were not able to perform to the best of their ability as a result of being the victim of a crime. An Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request should be submitted for this candidate. An Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request would also be accepted if the candidate chose not to sit the exam, or if they did sit the exam, but were unable to complete it due to the distress caused by the crime.*

*(b) A member of the candidate's immediate family is rushed to hospital the night before the exam with a sudden illness.*

*(c) 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. Examination (arrangements)

*Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration requests must be supported by a Chief Invigilator's Report describing the circumstance and its effect. This should be submitted to SQA along with the candidate's alternative evidence. If the report shows that invigilation procedures were applied to minimise adverse effects, then SQA may challenge the request.*

## **7. Who decides to submit a request?**

The decision as to whether or not to submit a request lies with the Head Teacher, who will use their professional judgement to determine whether a candidate has been fundamentally affected by an exceptional circumstance. Candidates must have consented to an Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request being submitted on their behalf to SQA.

## **8. Estimates**

An estimate is a prediction of a candidate's final band across all components of a Course. Departments should submit estimates for every National Course candidate. Candidates will only be eligible for Exceptional Circumstances Consideration where an estimate has been submitted.

## **9. Academic evidence**

The best evidence usually contains strong predictive value and helps indicate the likely outcome of Course assessment. Departments are encouraged to send in all available alternative academic evidence for consideration. The evidence must demonstrate coverage of the skills, knowledge and understanding required to match the Course Assessment Specification. The assessments must be unseen by the candidate, and the conditions of assessment should be consistent with those of the external assessment.

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

- Mock test**
- Class tests**
- Coursework**
- Unit assessments**

## **10. Evidence of circumstance**

We must hold the candidate's written consent, and relevant documentation on the circumstance, for each submitted Exceptional Circumstances Consideration request. This list below details the types of documentation that SQA would require:

- Bereavement: a letter or documentary evidence or a statement from the Head of Centre
- Medical condition: a letter or documentary evidence or a statement from the Head of Centre
- Domestic circumstance: a letter or documentary evidence or a statement from the Head of Centre
- Exceptional absence: a letter or documentary evidence or a statement from the Head of Centre
- Examination arrangements: a copy of the Chief Invigilator Report
- Disruption: a copy of the Chief Invigilator Report

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