



Joint Council for
Qualifications

A guide to the special consideration process

General and Vocational qualifications

With effect from 1 September 2019

Produced on behalf of:



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All queries regarding special consideration must be raised with the relevant awarding body and not the JCQ. The JCQ cannot address queries regarding special consideration.

Changes made to the content of this document since the previous version (1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019) are highlighted for easy identification.

Chapter 1

What is special consideration?

Special consideration is a post-examination adjustment to a candidate's mark or grade to reflect temporary illness, temporary injury or some other event outside of the candidate's control at the time of the assessment, which has had, or is reasonably likely to have had, a material effect on a candidate's ability to take an assessment or demonstrate his or her normal level of attainment in an assessment.

Special consideration can only seek to go some way to assist a candidate affected by a potentially wide range of difficulties, emotional or physical, which may influence performance in examinations. It cannot remove the difficulty faced by the candidate. There will be situations where candidates should not be entered for an examination. Only minor adjustments can be made to the mark awarded because to do more than this would jeopardize the standard of the examination.

There are minimum requirements for enhanced grading in cases of acceptable absence (see Chapter 4, section 4.3, pages 8 and 9).

All examinations are measuring what a candidate knows and can do. **The overall grades awarded must reflect the level of attainment demonstrated in the examination(s).** The grades awarded do not necessarily reflect the candidate's true level of ability if attainment has been considerably affected over a long period of time.

Where long term circumstances have prevented the candidate from reaching the competence standards it may not be possible to make an adjustment.

Chapter 2

Which candidates will be eligible for special consideration?

Special consideration must be applied for following a specific examination series.

- 2.1 **Candidates will be eligible for special consideration if they have been fully prepared and have covered the whole course but performance in the examination, or in the production of coursework or non-examination assessment, is materially affected by adverse circumstances beyond their control.** These include:
- 2.1.1 temporary illness or accident/injury **at the time of the assessment**;
 - 2.1.2 bereavement **at the time of the assessment** (where whole groups are affected, normally only those most closely involved will be eligible);
 - 2.1.3 domestic crisis arising **at the time of the assessment**;
 - 2.1.4 serious disturbance **during an examination**, particularly where recorded material is being used;
 - 2.1.5 accidental events **at the time of the assessment** such as being given the wrong examination paper, being given a defective examination paper or CD, failure of practical equipment, failure of materials to arrive on time;
 - 2.1.6 participation in **sporting events, training camps or other events at an international level at the time of the assessment**, e.g. representing their country at an international level in football or hockey;
 - 2.1.7 failure by the centre to implement **previously approved access arrangements for that specific examination series**.
- 2.2 When candidates have been fully prepared for the specification but the wrong texts have been chosen, special consideration may be given at the discretion of the awarding body.

Centres are advised that it is their responsibility to ensure that the correct texts are taught. Where this has not happened there can be no guarantee that a candidate will receive special consideration. Such instances will be investigated by the awarding body on a case-by-case basis.

Where the wrong texts have been taught, it is essential that the texts studied must have been examined in the current specification in a previous examination series.

- 2.3 **Candidates will NOT be eligible for special consideration** if preparation for or performance in the examination is affected by:
- 2.3.1 long term illness or other difficulties during the course affecting revision time, **unless the illness or circumstances manifest themselves at the time of the assessment**;
 - 2.3.2 bereavement occurring more than six months before the assessment, **unless an anniversary has been reached at the time of the assessment or there are on-going implications** such as an inquest or court case;
 - 2.3.3 domestic inconvenience, such as moving house, lack of facilities, taking holidays (**including school/exchange visits and field trips**) at the time of the assessment;
 - 2.3.4 minor disturbance in the examination room caused by another candidate, such as momentary bad behaviour or a mobile phone ringing;
 - 2.3.5 the consequences of committing a crime, where formally charged or found guilty; (However, a retrospective application for special consideration may be considered where the charge is later dropped or the candidate is found not guilty.)
 - 2.3.6 the consequences of taking alcohol or recreational drugs;
 - 2.3.7 the consequences of disobeying the centre's internal regulations;
 - 2.3.8 the failure of the centre to prepare candidates properly for the examination for whatever reason;
 - 2.3.9 staff shortages, building work or lack of facilities;
 - 2.3.10 misreading the timetable and/or failing to attend at the right time and in the right place;
 - 2.3.11 misreading the instructions of the question paper and answering the wrong questions;
 - 2.3.12 making personal arrangements such as a wedding or holiday arrangements which conflict with the examination timetable;
 - 2.3.13 submitting no coursework or non-examination assessment at all, unless coursework or non-examination assessment is scheduled for a restricted period of time, rather than during the course;
 - 2.3.14 missing all examinations and internally assessed components/units;
 - 2.3.15 failure to cover the course as a consequence of joining the class part way through;
 - 2.3.16 a disability or learning difficulties (diagnosed or undiagnosed) unless illness affects the candidate **at the time of the assessment** or where the disability exacerbates what would otherwise be a minor issue - (**difficulties over and above those that previously approved access arrangements would have alleviated**);
 - 2.3.17 failure by the centre to process access arrangements by the published deadline.

Chapter 3

Candidates who are present for the assessment but disadvantaged

- 3.1 Special consideration will normally be given by applying an allowance of marks to each component affected within a specification. The size of the allowance depends on the timing, nature and extent of the illness or misfortune. The maximum allowance given will be 5% of the total raw marks available in the component concerned, including coursework/non-examination assessment.
- 3.2 The decision made by the awarding body will be based on various factors which may vary from one subject to another. These may include:
- the severity of the circumstances;
 - the date of the examination in relation to the circumstances; and
 - the nature of the assessment, e.g. whether written papers are affected as opposed to coursework/non-examination assessment, or whether a Practical Test or a Speaking Test is involved.
- 3.3 **Special consideration cannot be applied in a cumulative fashion.** For example, on the basis of a domestic crisis at the time of the examination **and** the candidate suffering from a viral illness.

Candidates or their parents/carers should, in the first instance, discuss the application of special consideration with the school or college concerned.

Private candidates must liaise with the school or college which made entries on their behalf in respect of an application for special consideration.

The following are examples of circumstances which must apply at the time of the assessment.

5% This is the maximum allowance and will be reserved for the most exceptional cases, such as:

- terminal illness of the candidate;
- terminal illness of a parent/carer;
- death of a member of the immediate family **within two months** of the examination;
- very serious and disruptive crisis/incident **at or near the time of the examination.**

4% Very serious problems such as:

- life-threatening illness of candidate or member of immediate family;
- major surgery **at or near the time of the examination**;
- severe disease;
- very recent death of member of extended family;
- severe or permanent bodily injury occurring **at the time of the examination**;
- serious crisis/incident **at the time of the examination.**

N.B. 'Very recent' is defined as within one month of the examination(s) taking place.

3% A more common category, (more cases will fall into this category) including:

- **recent** traumatic experience such as death of a close friend or distant relative;
- **recent** illness of a more serious nature;
- flare-up of a severe congenital/medical condition or a psychological condition;
- broken limbs;
- organ disease;
- physical assault trauma before an examination;
- recent crisis/incident;
- witnessing a distressing event **on the day** of the examination involved.

N.B. 'Recent' is defined as four months prior to the examination(s) taking place.

2% The most common category of allowance - the majority of cases will fall within this category:

- illness **at the time of the examination**;
- broken limb on the mend;
- concussion;
- effects of pregnancy (**not pregnancy *per se***);
- extreme distress **on the day of an examination**; (**not simply exam related stress**)
- allowance on **last paper** taken in a day when a candidate has been entered for **three or more examinations timetabled for the same day and** the total duration of those papers is **more than 5 hours 30 minutes (GCSE examinations)** or **more than 6 hours (GCE examinations)**.

(Where extra time has been used following formal approval, this should be included in the calculation.)

(Supervised rest breaks **must not** be included in the total duration of the papers when applying for special consideration.)

1% Reserved for more minor problems:

- noise during examination which is more than momentary;
- illness of another candidate which leads to disruption in the examination room;
- stress or anxiety for which medication has been prescribed;
- hay fever **on the day** of an examination;
- minor upset arising from administrative problems.

Where the request for special consideration fails to meet the criteria it will be rejected.

Chapter 4

Candidates who are absent from a timetabled component/unit for acceptable reasons

- 4.1 When a candidate has missed a timetabled component/unit for acceptable reasons and the centre is prepared to support an application for special consideration, an adjustment may be made to the terminal grade. **However, the component/unit must have been missed in the terminal series and the minimum requirements of section 4.3 must be met.**

Awarding bodies cannot give advice as to whether a candidate is fit to take an examination. Centre staff must follow their internal procedures for dealing with candidates who feel unwell on the day of an examination.

- 4.2 **For unitised examinations taken in an examination series prior to certification, candidates must be re-entered for any missed units at the next assessment opportunity. Unless there are difficulties arising, e.g. group performances which cannot be repeated, special consideration will not be awarded.**

This principle also applies where entire cohorts miss units due to adverse weather conditions or for any other reason, or where individual candidates miss units as a result of a change of centre.

Minimum requirements for enhanced grading in cases of acceptable absence

- 4.3 The minimum requirements for enhanced grading in cases of acceptable absence are detailed below and on **page 9**. **In all cases, candidates must have been fully prepared and covered the whole course.**

GCE AS and A-level qualifications: (AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC specifications) at least 25% of the total assessment must have been completed[†].

Please note that partially completed AS or A2 units are not acceptable.

- **AS linear specifications: 25% of the total assessment must have been completed.**
- **AS unitised specifications: 25% of the total assessment must have been completed.**
- **Enhancement given at AS level (unitised specifications) will be carried forward to A-level.**
- **A-level linear specifications: 25% of the total assessment must have been completed.**
- **A-level six unit award (unitised specifications): 25% of the total assessment must have been completed with at least one A2 unit completed.**
- **A-level four unit award (unitised specifications): 25% of the total assessment must have been completed with at least one A2 unit completed.**
- **An A-level award (unitised specifications) will not be issued on the basis of AS units alone.**

GCSE: (AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC specifications)
25% of the total assessment **must** have been completed†

†For CCEA GCE AS and A-level qualifications, and GCSE qualifications, 40% of the total assessment **must** have been completed.

Projects (including Extended Project): where the project is not completed, a grade cannot be issued.

In rare and exceptional circumstances an awarding body may award a grade on a lower percentage. In such cases the centre must contact the relevant awarding body. However, an award **cannot** be made where none of the components/units within a specification have been completed.

Chapter 5

Other Issues

Other certification

- 5.1 Where a candidate has been entered for a specification and has subsequently died or is terminally ill and unable to sit examinations/assessments, the centre should contact the relevant awarding body. The awarding body will advise the centre of the process and the information required.

Centres should note that where an awarding body issues an honorary certificate or a letter of recognition this is not a qualification award and will not have any academic value.

Coursework/non-examination assessment extensions

- 5.2 Where an individual candidate meets the published criteria for special consideration, **i.e. a temporary illness, temporary injury or other indisposition prior to the submission of their work**, it may be possible to allow a short extension to the deadline.

An extension of no more than ten days to the deadline for the submission of work may enable the candidate to complete his/her work. **The centre must contact the relevant awarding body to request this arrangement.**

Shortfall in work (coursework/non-examination assessment)

- 5.3 If a candidate has been subject to an unforeseen prolonged illness or other misfortune during the period when the work was being produced, it may, in some subjects, be possible to accept a reduced quantity of work without penalty. **However, all of the assessment objectives must have been covered at least once.** This will not be possible if the specification only requires one piece.

Where several pieces of work are required, the reduction will only be accepted if those pieces are testing the same criteria. **It will not be possible to give this consideration in every case. For example, if work has not been submitted, the assessment objectives have not been satisfied or the candidate joined the course late.**

No adjustment to the marks must be made by the centre. Form 10 – JCQ/SC[†] should be submitted to the awarding body, attached to a breakdown of marks across the assessment objectives.

Candidates must have been fully prepared for the course but unable to finish the work. Awarding bodies will not normally agree a reduced amount of work in advance.

† AQA and OCR centres must not submit Form 10 – JCQ/SC.
Applications must be submitted on-line using e-AQA or OCR Interchange as appropriate.

Lost or damaged work (non-examination assessment components)

- 5.4 Please refer to the JCQ publication *Instructions for conducting non-examination assessments* - <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/non-examination-assessments>

Other problems

- 5.5 There are circumstances which arise by accident and where specialist input may be required. For example, an incorrect question paper was handed to the candidate or a question paper was defective in some way; such as an incorrectly printed page.

These cases are given special consideration by other means than those detailed so far. They may need to be referred to a subject officer or a senior examiner for a subject specific decision as to how special consideration should be awarded. This means that the results may not immediately show the enhancement. An adjustment of marks may have been made to take into account the problem which arose.

- 5.6 Centres may not realise that a candidate has been given an incorrect question paper. Awarding bodies will notify centres of any discrepancies. If the centre is aware of the error at the time of the examination the candidate should, where possible, be given the correct question paper as long as he/she is still under centre supervision and is able to continue with the examination.

An application for special consideration should be submitted to the relevant awarding body when the incorrect paper has been taken, the incorrect paper has been replaced by the correct paper or the candidate has taken both. There are circumstances where it is not possible for an awarding body to grant special consideration to candidates who have attempted an incorrect paper.

- 5.7 Where candidates have taken the wrong coursework or non-examination assessment assignment, the centre may submit an application for special consideration if it is not possible to enter candidates at the next assessment opportunity. There are circumstances where it is not possible for an awarding body to grant special consideration to candidates who have attempted the incorrect coursework or non-examination assessment component.

Chapter 6

Processing applications for special consideration (GCSE and GCE qualifications)

On-line applications for special consideration

- **Applications for special consideration in respect of AQA, CCEA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC GCSE and GCE qualifications must be processed on-line.**
- **On-line applications must be made for timetabled written examinations. Paper forms will not be accepted.**
- On-line applications for special consideration are made through e-AQA, CCEA SpC Online, Edexcel Online, OCR Interchange and WJEC Secure Website.
- In the majority of cases the on-line system will provide an instant decision.
- **For AQA, CCEA and OCR, centres must also make on-line applications where there are problems with internally assessed components/units such as coursework and non-examination assessments, and in cases involving groups of candidates. Paper forms will not be accepted by AQA, CCEA and OCR.**
- Where a candidate is present but disadvantaged for a timetabled written examination, a single on-line application can be made for all affected components once the examinations are over or once the candidate has recovered; whichever occurs first. It is not necessary to make separate applications for individual examinations.
- Where a candidate is present but disadvantaged for a timetabled written examination a proportion of cases will be sampled by an awarding body for quality assurance purposes. **A centre may be asked by an awarding body to provide signed evidence, produced by a member of the senior leadership team, in support of an application. The centre must retain evidence supporting an on-line special consideration application until after the publication of results.**
- Where a candidate is absent from an examination for an acceptable reason it is necessary to make a separate application for each day on which examinations are missed.
- Where a candidate is absent from an examination for an acceptable reason a proportion of cases will be sampled by an awarding body for quality assurance purposes. **A centre may be asked by an awarding body to provide signed evidence, produced by a member of the senior leadership team, in support of an application. The centre must retain evidence supporting a candidate's absence from an examination until after the publication of results.**

Paper applications

- 6.1 **Form 10 – JCQ/SC must** be submitted where a paper application is specifically required by the awarding body. One form must be submitted by the head of centre/examinations officer per candidate, per subject. Appropriate and up to date evidence **must** support the application for special consideration. **Form 10 – JCQ/SC must be signed; an electronic signature is acceptable. Applications will not be accepted if submitted directly by parents or candidates.**

Private candidates must liaise with the school or college which made entries on their behalf in respect of an application for special consideration.

- 6.2 **After the publication of results, late applications will only be accepted in the most exceptional circumstances and must be submitted before the deadline for reviews of results for the respective examination series.**

A member of the senior leadership team must produce evidence to support a late application.

An application for special consideration cannot be submitted after the completion of a review of results.

- 6.3 A member of the senior leadership team may attach a letter of explanation to the form where the circumstances are unusual, or the form is inadequate for the particular situation which has arisen. In some cases, it is appropriate to submit one form with a covering letter and attach to it a list of candidates affected.

- 6.4 It is not possible for all letters to receive an individual reply. It is more important to process the applications before the issue of results. Awarding bodies may be unable to respond personally to each individual application.

Letters will not be sent to candidates and/or parents/carers, whose cases must be dealt with by the centre.

The awarding bodies have a published appeals process in respect of decisions on special consideration. This process is set out in the JCQ publication *A guide to the awarding bodies' appeals processes* – <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/appeals/jcq-appeals-booklet>

Some examples of when special consideration is and is not appropriate

Example 1

A Year 12 candidate is sitting GCE AS qualifications in June 2020. The candidate is unable to attend any of his AS examinations (Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics) due to ill health. The centre will re-enter him again for GCE AS Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics at the next available assessment opportunity – June 2021.

Example 2

A candidate misses two GCSE papers in one day, Computer Science in the morning and Religious Studies in the afternoon, due to ill health. She meets the minimum requirements for a GCSE award in June 2020, having completed over 25% of the total assessment in both GCSE subjects. The centre applies for special consideration. As the centre knows that the candidate has been struggling with her health over the past few days, there is no need for them to ask the candidate to produce a letter from her GP. The centre can write a supporting letter to substantiate her absence from the two GCSE papers.

Example 3

A candidate sits a GCE A-level Government and Politics examination on Thursday afternoon. He is known to be struggling with a chest and ear infection yet is adamant that he must sit his examination. The candidate's illness is clearly evident to the invigilation team. However, the candidate is unable to attend his GCE A-level Physical Education examination the following morning. He meets the minimum requirements for a GCE A-level Physical Education award since he has already sat one paper earlier in the week. The centre is in a position to write a statement supporting the application for special consideration since they know he was falling ill prior to his absence from Friday morning's examination.

Example 4

A candidate sits a GCSE Russian examination on Tuesday afternoon. There were no known problems during Tuesday's examination. However, she does not attend for her GCSE General Studies examination on Wednesday morning. Her mother contacts the school office on the morning of the General Studies examination to report her absence owing to a stomach upset. Medical evidence is not available to substantiate the request. The centre advises the parent to complete the relevant part of **Form 14 – JCQ/ME** which is then brought into the school office. The centre having received **Form 14** feels able to support the application and submits an on-line application for special consideration. Form 14 is retained on the centre's files.

Example 5

A candidate sits a GCE A-level Psychology examination on Thursday morning. He is undergoing treatment for a serious illness. The candidate has recently been prescribed medication which is causing serious side effects. The candidate sits his GCE A-level Psychology examination as scheduled but is unable to sit his remaining GCE A-level Drama and Theatre and A-level English Literature examinations the following day. He can satisfy the rules for special consideration since he has completed 50% of the specification in both GCE A level Drama and Theatre and GCE A-level English Literature. The candidate visits his GP who, on account of her knowledge of her patient and his condition, is more than willing to produce a note for the school. Similarly, his school is willing to write a supporting statement.

Chapter 7

Post assessment adjustments – special consideration (Vocational qualifications)

7.1 The awarding of special consideration – vocational qualifications

An awarding body's decision to award special consideration in vocational qualifications will be based on various factors, which may vary from learner to learner and from one assessment to another. These factors may include the severity of the circumstances, the date of the assessment and the nature of the assessment.

It is important to note that it may not be possible to apply special consideration where:

- an assessment requires the demonstration of a practical competence;
- the assessment criteria have to be fully met;
- units/qualifications confer 'Licence to Practise'.

Where an assessment has been missed or is in the form of an on-demand test, such as an electronic test set and marked by a computer, the centre should offer the learner an opportunity to take the assessment at a later date.

Advice **must** always be sought from the relevant awarding body.

7.2 Applying for special consideration in vocational qualifications

Applications for special consideration **must** be made on a case by case basis. Separate applications **must** be made for each learner. The only exception to this is where a group of learners have been affected by a similar circumstance during an assessment, such as a fire alarm. A list of learners affected **must** be attached to the application.

Applications for special consideration **must** be submitted to the relevant awarding body using **Form VQ/SC**.

Form VQ/SC is available electronically at:

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/forms>

To ensure effective processing of applications centres **must** additionally submit evidence to support the application. For example, a statement from a member of centre staff or any other appropriate information.

The head of centre/Principal/CEO **must** authorise all applications for special consideration.

During the processing of an application, an awarding body will only liaise with the centre making an application for special consideration on behalf of a learner.

Special consideration will not be considered once learner achievement has been claimed and certificated.

7.3 Lost or damaged work (internally assessed work)

When a learner's work has been lost or damaged, an awarding body may consider an application for special consideration. In all cases, the centre **must** be able to verify that the work was done and that it was monitored whilst it was in progress.

For competence based qualifications, the centre has a requirement to maintain assessment records independently of the learner's portfolio. In the case of a lost portfolio, these records, together with fully documented question and answer sessions or written statements, as appropriate, can be used to confirm a learner's competence. A portfolio re-created, because evidence has been lost, should be internally verified.

The centre **must** follow the awarding body's published procedures for lost or damaged work.

7.4 Other certification

An honorary certificate should be requested where a learner is terminally ill or deceased.

Advice **must** be sought from the relevant awarding body who will inform the centre of the process.

Centres should note that where an awarding body issues an honorary certificate or a letter of recognition this is not a qualification award and will not have any academic value.