

MAY 2024

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION – WHAT, WHEN AND HOW

As part of their preparations for the summer exam series, exams officers will need to be aware of a process known as special consideration and when and how it is applied during an exam series.

The special consideration process cannot remove the difficulty faced by the candidate, but it can go some way to assist a candidate affected by a potentially wide range of difficulties, emotional or physical, which may influence performance in their examinations. However, the process does not cover all scenarios, and there may be some instances where it is more appropriate for the candidate not to be entered for the examination.

The special consideration process helps to protect a key element of the examination system - ensuring that a 'level playing field' exists for all candidates so that no one is advantaged and disadvantaged.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) publishes [A guide to the special consideration process](#) which should be read by heads of centre, senior leaders within schools and colleges and examination officers.

What is special consideration?

Unfortunately, there may be an occasion during an exam series when a candidate experiences a temporary illness, injury or some other event outside of their control at the time of the examination or assessment. If this temporary issue or event has had, or is reasonably likely to have had, a material effect on a candidate's ability to take an assessment or demonstrate their normal level of attainment in an assessment, then it may be that special consideration can be applied.

Special consideration may also be applied if the candidate's performance in an examination or assessment has been affected by adverse non-medical circumstances beyond their control, for example, a bereavement, domestic crisis at the time of the assessment, or issues which may occur during the examination, such as a serious disturbance or an accidental event 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, etc.

Candidates will only be eligible for special consideration if they have been:

- fully prepared and have covered the whole course
- impacted by a particular issue at the time of the assessment

Special consideration can also be applied for an allowance on the 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, Level 1 and Level 2 examinations) or more than 6 hours (GCE and Level 3 examinations). In this instance, the likely allowance of additional marks would be 2% 'for the last paper taken that day.

[When special consideration does not apply](#)

Special consideration can only be applied where the performance of a candidate is materially impacted by a particular issue at the time of the assessment. Therefore, it does **not** apply in the following circumstances:

- a bereavement which has occurred 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)
- pregnancy at the time of the assessment (unless health issues are being experienced as a result of the pregnancy at the time of the examination)

Special consideration would also **not** apply in the following circumstances:

- a minor disturbance in the examination room caused by another candidate, such as momentary bad behaviour or a mobile phone ringing
- a domestic inconvenience, such as moving house, lack of facilities, taking holidays
- making personal arrangements such as a wedding or holiday arrangements which conflict with the examination timetable

For more information, refer to section 2.3 of [A guide to the special consideration process](#)

Special consideration mark allowance

Where a candidate is present for the assessment but disadvantaged, special consideration is normally given by applying an allowance of additional 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. Below is an example of the mark allowance for specific circumstances:

- **5%** - This is the maximum allowance and will be reserved for the most exceptional cases, such as terminal illness of the candidate or a parent/carer, brother or sister. It is also applied in the instance of a death of a member of the immediate family within three months of the examination.
- **4%** - This allowance is applied for very serious problems such as a life-threatening illness of candidate or member of immediate family, major surgery at or near the time of the examination, or severe or permanent bodily injury or a serious crisis/incident at the time of the examination.
- **3%** - This is a more common category which includes a recent traumatic experience such as death of a close friend or distant relative, recent illness of a more serious nature, a flare-up of a severe congenital/medical condition or a psychological condition, or a broken limb(s). Note that 'recent' is defined as up to four months prior to the examination(s) taking place.
- **2%** - This is the most common category of allowance and includes illness at the time of the examination, a broken limb(s) on the mend, the effects of pregnancy (not pregnancy per se) and extreme distress on the day of an examination (not simply exam related stress).
- **1%** - This is reserved for more minor problems such as noise during an examination which is more than momentary, the illness of another candidate which leads to minor disruption in the examination room or hay fever on the day of an examination.

Special consideration cannot be applied in a cumulative fashion and an application should only be made for the most serious indisposition.

For more information, refer to section 3 of [A guide to the special consideration process](#).

Absent from a timetabled component/unit for acceptable reasons

Where a candidate has missed (is absent from) a timetabled component/unit for an acceptable reason and the centre is prepared to support an application for special consideration, the awarding body may make an adjustment to the terminal grade. However, the component/unit must have been missed in the terminal series and the minimum requirements for enhanced grading in cases of acceptable absence must be met.

For example, for GCE AS and A-level and GCSE qualifications (AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC linear specifications) one whole component, which is a minimum of 15% of the total assessment, must normally have been completed.

For more information, refer to section 4 of [A guide to the special consideration process](#).

When should centres process an application for special consideration?

Centres are permitted to submit special consideration applications for timetabled written examinations to awarding bodies at any point after the affected examination(s). For the summer 2024 examination series, the final date for submitting special consideration requests to awarding bodies for GCSE and GCE examinations is **3 July 2024**.

How do centres process an application for special consideration?

Applications for special consideration in respect of timetabled written examinations delivered by AQA, CCEA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC GCSE and GCE qualifications must be processed online. Paper forms will not be accepted. Spreadsheets must not be submitted to awarding bodies.

Online applications for special consideration are made through:

- AQA Centre Services
- CCEA SpC Online
- Edexcel Online
- OCR Interchange
- WJEC Secure Website

In most cases the online system will provide an instant decision.

Role of senior leaders within the centre

Senior leaders play a significant role in the special consideration application process, as they are required to provide signed evidence/statement to support each application.

All applications must be supported by appropriate evidence signed by a member of the senior leadership team. The centre must retain this evidence until after the publication of results.

Information sharing

As candidate information is being shared with a third party, centres must comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)/Data Protection Act 2018 and inform the candidate when an application for special consideration is submitted to the awarding body.

Late applications

There may be exceptional circumstances – such as evidence coming to light which was previously unknown/unavailable - where an application for special consideration has to be submitted after the publication of results.

Such 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. Late applications must also be supported by compelling evidence produced by a member of the senior leadership team.

An application for special consideration cannot be submitted after the completion of a review of results. For more information, refer to section 6 of [A guide to the special consideration process](#).

Conclusion

The term 'special consideration' is commonly used in relation to adverse situations experienced by candidates before, during and after their examination(s).

However, as this article highlights, special consideration exists within the examination system to deal with specific circumstances faced by candidates who experience emotional or physical difficulties at the time of the examination or assessment.

Key centre staff – the head of centre, the relevant senior leader(s) and the exams officer – must be aware of the regulations associated with the special consideration process. They must be aware of when special consideration may, or may not, apply, and be fully informed of the indicative mark allowance (in cases where a candidate is present for the assessment but disadvantaged) and the minimum requirement for enhanced grading (in cases where a candidate is absent for an acceptable reason) so they can make the correct decisions and provide candidates – and their parents/carers – with the most relevant and accurate advice, guidance and information.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (End of March 2024)

Useful resources

JCQ

- [A guide to the special consideration process 2023/24](#)
- [Infographic – key reminders: access arrangements and special consideration](#)
- [Infographic – helpful tips for processing special consideration applications](#)
- [Form 10: Application for special consideration](#)

The Exams Office

- [Special Consideration Policy template](#)
- [Special consideration: Appropriate evidence form template](#)