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SPECIAL CONSIDERATION – WHAT, WHEN AND HOW

With the JCQ common deadline* for submitting special consideration requests fast approaching - 1 July for GCSE, GCE and (AQA, Cambridge OCR, City & Guilds, NCFE, Pearson and WJEC) VTQs - exams managers/officers need to understand what special consideration is, and when and how it should be applied during an exam series.

Although special consideration cannot remove the difficulties a candidate has faced, it can help where emotional or physical circumstances may have affected their performance in an examination. It does not apply in every situation, however, and in some cases it may be more appropriate not to enter a candidate for a qualification.

The purpose of special consideration is to protect a key principle of the examination system: maintaining a level playing field so that no candidate is unfairly advantaged or 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 exams managers/officers.

*(*An individual awarding body may however offer an extended deadline - please refer to awarding body key dates information)*

What is special consideration?

During an exam series, a candidate may sometimes experience a temporary illness, injury, or another event outside their control at the time of an examination (the 'assessment'). If this has had, or is likely to have had, a material effect on the candidate's ability to take the assessment or to demonstrate their normal level of attainment, special consideration may apply.

Special consideration may also be applied if the candidate's performance in an assessment has been materially affected by adverse non-medical circumstances beyond their control, for example:

- a recent bereavement in the immediate family
- domestic crisis arising 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 which materially affects their performance

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 which have been 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). These timings include any approved extra time allowance.

It should be noted that in this instance, the likely allowance of additional marks would be 2% for the last paper taken that day.

When does special consideration apply...and when does it not apply?

Special consideration covers many scenarios. There are 'standard' instances where a candidate is present but disadvantaged or absent from a timetabled exam for an acceptable reason, but there may also be exceptional cases which will require specialist input from within an awarding body to decide whether special consideration may apply.

Special consideration can only be applied where the performance of a candidate is materially affected by a particular issue at the time of the assessment.

Special consideration 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 (unless health issues are being experienced as a result of the pregnancy at the time of the assessment)

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

- a domestic inconvenience, such as moving house, lack of facilities, taking holidays at the time of the assessment
- making personal arrangements such as a wedding or holiday arrangements which conflict with the examination timetable
- a minor disturbance in the examination room caused by another candidate, such as momentary bad behaviour or a mobile phone ringing
- Trivial cases involving noise outside of the exam room, such as:
 - A bird tweeting
 - A lorry reversing
 - A toilet being flushed
 - Doors in a corridor adjacent to the exam room opening and closing
 - Very short, momentary noise from, for example, aeroplanes, helicopters, lawn mowers

The table below provides additional information relating to criteria and situations where candidates may, or may not, be eligible for special consideration.

Criteria where candidates <u>are</u> eligible for special consideration	Criteria where candidates <u>are not</u> eligible for special consideration
Temporary illness or accident/injury at the time of the assessment	Long term illness
Bereavement at the time of the assessment (where whole groups are affected, normally only those most closely involved will be eligible)	Bereavement occurring more than 6 months before the assessment, unless it is an anniversary or there are ongoing implications
Domestic crisis arising at the time of the assessment	Domestic inconvenience such as moving house, lack of facilities, taking holidays (including school/exchange visits and field trips) at the time of the assessment
Serious disturbance during an exam	Minor disturbance in the exam by another candidate such as momentary bad behaviour, a mobile phone ringing, or a momentary fire alarm
Accidental events at the time of the assessment such as being given the wrong exam paper, being given a defective exam paper or CD, failure of practical equipment, failure of materials to arrive on time	The consequences of committing a crime (However, a retrospective application for special consideration may be considered where a criminal charge is later dropped or the candidate is found not guilty)
Participation in sporting events, training camps or other events at an international level at the time of the assessment, e.g. representing their club or country at an international level on the day of an exam	The consequences of taking alcohol or recreational drugs.
Failure by the centre to implement previously approved access arrangements for that specific exam series	The consequences of disobeying the centre's internal regulations
	The failure of the centre to prepare candidates properly for the exam
	Quality of teaching, loss of teaching, staff shortages, planned building work or lack of facilities
	Misreading the timetable and/or failing to attend the exam at the right time and/or in the right place
	Misreading the instructions on the question paper
	Making personal arrangements such as a wedding or holiday arrangements on the day of an exam
	Not submitting any coursework or non-examination assessment, unless the coursework or non-examination assessment is

	scheduled for a restricted period of time, rather than during the course
	Missing all exams and internally assessed components/units
	Failure to cover the course because of joining the class partway through
	A disability or learning difficulties (diagnosed or undiagnosed) unless the disability or circumstances exacerbate what would otherwise be a minor issue at the time of the assessment, i.e. Difficulties over and above those that previously approved access arrangements would have alleviated
	Failure by the centre to process access arrangements by the published deadline

For more information, refer to section 2 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 a percentage to the total raw marks available in the component concerned. How much is applied depends on the timing, nature and extent of the illness or misfortune. Below are some examples for specific circumstances:

- **5%** - This is the maximum allowed 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 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, 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 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 candidate's most serious indisposition.

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

Absent from a timetabled component or unit for acceptable reasons

Where a candidate has missed (is absent from) a timetabled component or 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 or 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, Cambridge OCR, Pearson and WJEC linear specifications) one whole component, which is a minimum of 15% of the total assessment, must 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 an awarding body at any point after the affected examination(s). For the summer 2026 examination series, the JCQ common deadline* for submitting special consideration requests to awarding bodies is 1 July 2026.

(*An individual awarding body may however offer an extended deadline - please refer to awarding body key dates information)

How do centres process an application for special consideration?

Applications for special consideration in respect of timetabled written examinations delivered by AQA, Cambridge OCR, CCEA, City & Guilds, NCFE, Pearson, TQUK and WJEC 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
- Cambridge OCR Interchange
- CCEA SpC Online
- Edexcel Online
- NCFE secure website
- TQUK Verve management system
- WJEC Portal

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

The role of senior leaders

Senior leaders play a significant role in the special consideration application process, as all applications must be supported by the centre with appropriate evidence authorised by a member of the senior leadership team. The centre must retain this evidence until after the publication of the 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. 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 often used to describe adverse circumstances affecting candidates before, during and after their examinations.

However, as this article explains, within the examination system special consideration applies only to specific circumstances where a candidate experiences a temporary illness, injury or another event outside their control at the time of the assessment.

Key centre staff - including the head of centre, relevant senior leader(s), and the exams manager or officer - must understand the regulations governing the special consideration process. They need to know when special consideration may, or may not, apply, and be familiar with both the indicative allowance for candidates who are present but disadvantaged and the minimum requirements for enhanced grading where a candidate is absent for an acceptable reason. This enables them to make informed decisions and provide candidates, and their parents or carers, with accurate advice, guidance and information.

The contents of this article were correct at the time of publication (End of May 2026)

Useful resources

JCQ

- [A guide to the special consideration process 2025/26](#)
- [Reminders: access arrangements and special consideration](#)
- [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](#)