

CBN POLICY BRIEFING

THE ISSUE

We are sometimes asked about the process by which a candidate who has experienced a significant bereavement or one whose parent or close family member is seriously ill can be given 'special consideration'. Special consideration is a post-examination adjustment to a candidate's marks to reflect special circumstances.

ENGLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The Joint Council on Qualifications sets the terms for any special consideration on behalf of all examination boards. The terms are all laid out on their website (www.jcq.org.uk); this link will take you to the latest document <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance>

Current position – General and Vocational Qualifications

In brief, there are now standard 'tariffs' for certain occurrences across ALL examination boards and ALL subjects. The Council makes the point that special consideration 'cannot remove the difficulty faced by the candidate'. In general, 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 controlled assessment/coursework is materially affected by adverse circumstances beyond their control'. Relevant examples include

- ➔ bereavement **at the time of the assessment** (where whole groups are affected, normally, only those most closely involved will be eligible)
- ➔ domestic crisis arising **at the time of the assessment**.

The document specifies that candidates will NOT be eligible for special consideration if preparation for or performance in the examination is affected by

- ➔ 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.

The maximum allowance given will be **5% of the total raw marks** and exactly what percentage allowance for any occurrence will be determined by the severity of the circumstances, the date of the exam in relation to the circumstances, whether what was affected was coursework, practical task, examination etc. Illustrations of what circumstances of bereavement would generate consideration are shown below.

Chapter 6 of the guidance shows the process for making online or paper applications (using official Form 10 – JQA/SC) for special consideration, through the exam officer of the young person's school or college, who should be familiar with the process. It specifies that paper applications must be made 'within 7 days of the last examination in the series in each subject' (but advice is to do it as soon as possible after the affected exam/s). In most cases some kind of collaboration (eg a note from a doctor) would be required.

Current position – National Curriculum Assessments ('SATs')

There are special considerations for the National Curriculum Assessments at the end of Key Stage Two (usually taken in Year 6). These may be granted when a child is affected by: the death of a close family member or close friend within 12 months before the tests; the terminal illness or significant incapacitating illness of a child or close family member; and 'other major unpredicted disruption at the time of the tests'. Special consideration is **not** applicable when a child has experienced the death of a close family member or close friend more than 12 months before the tests, unless there are ongoing implications such as an inquest or court case at the time of the tests. Applications need to be made by the school very quickly after the tests and guidance is here <https://www.gov.uk/key-stage-2-tests-how-to-apply-for-special-consideration>. There is still the underlying intention that the 'SATs' are an indication of a school's performance rather than that of an individual child – but schools, parents and children may perceive the Year 6 SAT as a test of the child. The assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 and 3 are teacher assessments and there is an assumption that teachers will make any adjustments required due to special circumstances. There is no official guidance.

The following comes from Chapter 3 of the Joint Council on Qualifications document and is 'for illustrative purposes only'; it refers to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We have only included here the circumstances more likely to affect pupils who have or are likely to face bereavement: there are many other circumstances detailed in the JQA guidance. These are their allowances for total raw marks – so if, for example, an exam is marked out of 100, and a candidate who has experienced special circumstances, scores 75, this will be enhanced by between one per cent to five percent (thus becoming 76 - 80 marks) depending on the circumstances below.

5 percent. 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;
- ➔ very recent death of a member of the immediate family;
- ➔ very serious and disruptive domestic crisis leading to acute anxiety about the family.

4 percent. 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;
- ➔ severe injury arising from a car accident;
- ➔ very recent death of member of extended family;
- ➔ severe or permanent bodily injury occurring at the time of the examinations;
- ➔ serious domestic crisis at time of examinations.

3 percent. 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 domestic crisis;
- ➔ witnessing a distressing event on the day of the examination.

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

- ➔ extreme distress on day of examination (not simply exam related stress);

1 percent. Reserved for more minor problems:

- ➔ stress or anxiety for which medication has been prescribed;
- ➔ minor ailments.

There are other considerations for extending coursework deadlines or accepting partially completed coursework in special circumstances. All information is on <http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-system/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration>

SCOTLAND

The arrangements in **Scotland** are slightly different and determined more on a case-by-case basis; there is no 'tariff' as such. The Scottish Qualifications Authority has recently launched its Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service. This service will assist candidates who could not sit an exam or who sat an exam but their performance suffered because of exceptional circumstances, which include bereavement. If a school or college believes that a candidate is likely to have been affected by exceptional circumstances, it must inform SQA within 10 working days of the exam. The school or college must submit alternative evidence in support of the candidate. A wide range of evidence will be considered and requests are submitted online. More information is available at www.sqa.org.uk

WHAT CBN MEMBERS CAN DO

Please make sure that any children and young people whose public examinations might be affected by bereavement know to apply through their school for special consideration. We would be very grateful for any examples you could tell us of young people who required this special consideration when a parent's or sibling's death or serious illness came at the time of public examinations. We will treat any such information as confidential but it will help us build up a picture of what is actually happening in this area. Please send this, or any questions, to dstubbs@ncb.org.uk.

Briefing updated September 2014