

Introduction

Exams, assessments and coursework are challenging and stressful for any pupils. For those facing bereavement or the terminal illness of a family member, they can be particularly difficult. This paper explores the process under which a pupil can be given 'special consideration' around exams and assessments because of their bereavement. 'Special consideration' is an adjustment to a candidate's marks following an assessment, that takes account of their 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, across all subjects. Their website includes the most [up to date version](#) of these terms.

General and Vocational Qualifications

The JCQ points out that special consideration *'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'*. It warns *'Where long term circumstances have prevented the candidate from reaching the competence standards it may not be possible to make an adjustment'*.

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 or non-examination assessment, 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 guidance specifies that candidates will NOT be eligible for special consideration if their preparation for or performance in an exam 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 adjustment given will be **5% of the total raw marks**. The exact percentage will be determined by the severity of the circumstances, the date of the assessment in relation to the circumstances, and the type of assessment. Circumstances cannot be applied cumulatively (eg on the basis of a the death of a parent/carer AND the candidate suffering a viral illness).

The process for applying for special consideration is set out in chapter 6 of the [guidance](#). This must be done through the young person's school or college, which should be familiar with the process. Private candidates must liaise with the school or college which made entries on their behalf.

Chapter 3 of the guidance sets out the types of adjustments that might be made in different circumstances. We have only included here the circumstances more likely to affect pupils facing or following bereavement.

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 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:

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

1% Reserved for more minor problems:

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

There are other considerations for extending coursework deadlines or accepting partially completed coursework in special circumstances. See the [guidance](#) for more information.

National Curriculum Assessments (SATs) at the end of Key Stage 2

If a pupil is affected by extremely distressing circumstances in test week, or the weeks immediately before, the school can apply for special consideration of the pupil's results. If approved, an adjustment will be made to the school's performance measures. The pupil's individual test result is not amended.

Eligible circumstances under which special consideration would apply include if the pupil's performance is affected by the bereavement of a family member or close friend within 12 months of the test, or if the pupil, or a close family member, has a diagnosed terminal illness at the time of the tests. Bereavement of a close family member or close friend more than 12 months before the test would not be eligible circumstances, unless there are ongoing proceedings such as an inquest or court case at the time of the tests. Full guidance can be read on the Standards and Testing Agency [website](#).

Scotland

The arrangements in Scotland are slightly different and determined more on a case-by-case basis. The Scottish Qualifications Authority's [Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Scheme](#) assists candidates who could not sit an exam, or who sat an exam but their performance suffered because of exceptional circumstances, which include bereavement. Only schools and colleges can submit requests, and these must be made quickly following the exam.